





CAPT^N. GORDON,
Royal Navy.



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STERN'S



BY

ALFRED WILSON

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STERN'S

LONDON

PRINTED FOR GEORGE WILSON

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LONDON

1815

SERMONS.

BY

DANIEL WILSON, M.A.

OF ST. EDMUND HALL, OXFORD;

AND MINISTER OF ST. JOHN'S CHAPEL, BEDFORD ROW, LONDON.

THE SECOND EDITION.

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PRINTED FOR GEORGE WILSON,

SUCCESSOR TO ROBERT BICKERSTAFF,

CORNER OF ESSEX STREET, STRAND.

1818.

S E R M O N S .



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DANIEL WILSON, M.A.



THE SECOND EDITION.

LONDON:

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CORNER OF BARK STREET, ST. MARK'S.

1818.

TO
THE INHABITANTS
OF THE
PARISH OF ST. ANDREW, HOLBORN,
AND OTHERS, WHO USUALLY FORM
THE CONGREGATION
AT
St. John's Chapel, Bedford Row,
THESE SERMONS,
ORIGINALLY ADDRESSED TO THEM,
AND NOW PUBLISHED, WITH THE DESIGN OF SUPPLYING
IN SOME DEGREE THE DEFICIENCY OF
PERSONAL INTERCOURSE,
ARE,
WITH FERVENT PRAYER FOR THE DIVINE BLESSING,
MOST AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED,

BY

THE AUTHOR,

TO

THE INHABITANTS

OF THE

PARISH OF ST. ANDREW, HOLBORN

AND VICAR, AND PARISH CHURCH

THE CONGREGATION

BY JOHN CLAPHAM, ESQ.

THREE SERMONS

ORIGINALLY ADDRESSED TO THEM

AND NOW REPRINTED WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE CHURCH

IN LOVE AND THE BENEDICTION OF

THE LOCAL INTERESTS

AND

WITH A PRESENT TRACT FOR THE DIVINE BLESSING

AND A COLLECTION OF THE BIBLE

BY

THE AUTHOR

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 his counsel by us unto every man.

Balmaghie —

S E R M O N S.

SERMON I.

THE EXCELLENCY OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

PSALM XIX. 7—10.

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honey-comb.

THERE are two methods which God is pleased to employ in the instruction of mankind. He teaches them by the works of creation, and by the words of Holy Scripture. The heavens declare the glory of God; and man, if he had

not fallen, would have continued to understand this language. The book of revelation might then have been unnecessary. But man as a sinner has no ear to listen to the voice of God in his works; and it is only by the revealed words of Scripture, that he can find the way of pardon and holiness. The Psalmist, accordingly, after he had spoken magnificently, in the preceding verses, of the display of the divine perfections in the works of creation and providence, makes a sudden transition in the text to the book of revelation, and extols it far above them. The abruptness of this transition, when considered in connexion with the commendations bestowed on the inspired volume, seems to point out the insufficiency of the instructions of nature, and the necessity and excellency of a revelation from God.

The subject, then, which we have now to consider is, the excellency of the Sacred Scriptures.

In explaining this, I shall have to point out, the properties, the efficacy, and the value of the word of God.

I. WE MUST NOTICE THE EXCELLENT PROPERTIES OF THE WORD OF GOD.

AS A LAW IT IS PERFECT. The revelation of God, which is his law in the most extensive sense of the term, is complete and entire. It

has no flaw nor defect. It contains every thing necessary for our salvation. Nature declares the glory of God only in a general manner; and even this instruction is to us now become obscure and imperfect. It was suited to man in his state of innocence; but it cannot show him his danger as a transgressor, or point out any certain method of pardon, or give him any sure hope of felicity. But the law of God is perfect. Nothing can be added to it, nothing taken from it. It embraces every part of truth. Not indeed every part, absolutely speaking; but every part which God has seen it right to reveal. It comprehends all our duty, and all our consolation; all that is necessary to make us happy and holy; all that regards the doctrine of pardon and the way of peace. It reveals the *good and acceptable and perfect will of God*.

The writings of the heathen philosophers contain a few mutilated principles and some fine sentiments; but they are incomplete as a rule, and grossly defective as to their principles of action. The Bible alone is *perfect*, beginning with the statement of man's sinfulness and guilt, discovering to us a stupendous atonement for sin, revealing a Spirit of grace and holiness, laying down a complete rule of life; and connecting with these a history of the creation, fall, and redemption of mankind. It is *all given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine,*

for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

But further, AS A TESTIMONY, THE WORD OF GOD is spoken of as SURE. Considered as the solemn witness and attestation of God to all those truths which concern man's everlasting salvation, it is sure. It comes with a force and authority to the conscience. The former property denoted the completeness, this the solidity and firmness, if I may be allowed the expression, of the instructions of God in the Scriptures. They are faithful. They are like solid ground on which your foot stands fast, and where you may take a firm step. The authenticity and divine inspiration of the Bible being established by accumulated evidence, all its contents are to be entirely depended on. Whatever doubts we may have as to the opinions or writings of the best of men, we can have none with regard to the words of the Holy Ghost. They are a sure direction as to the principles of truth, and a sure guide in the way of duty.

It is added, that THE STATUTES OF THE LORD ARE RIGHT. The statutes and judgments of the divine law are altogether *right, true, clean, and righteous.* (Ver. 8 and 9.) The equity and holiness of them equal their completeness and certainty. They are in all respects true and just and excellent. There is nothing harsh, nothing

defiling, nothing erroneous, nothing arbitrary in them. They have not only authority, but goodness on their side. We may not in all points be able to perceive the reasons of the divine declarations. It would be surprising if we could. But shall we not believe that *the Judge of all the earth doth right*? Shall we not adore what we cannot comprehend? Shall we not esteem *all God's precepts concerning all things to be right*? Though obscurity rest on some part of the words and judgments of the Almighty; yet shall we not acknowledge, that they are in themselves undoubtedly *true and righteous altogether*; conceived in eternal wisdom, founded on eternal truth, strictly harmonizing with the unchangeable principles of good and evil, precisely and in every respect that which they ought to be? And as to the leading features of the moral government of God, as to the stupendous mercies of redemption and the offers and terms of salvation, there is no enlightened mind but must at once discover their rectitude and excellency. They are clean from all dross or alloy; they are free from all error; they are completely true and righteous.

It is a further property of the word of God, that, AS A COMMANDMENT, IT IS PURE. The Bible is a clear and perspicuous rule of duty. Like the light of the sun (to which the word rendered *pure* may allude), it is lucid and bril-

liant, without any mixture of darkness. The perspicuity of Holy Writ is as remarkable as its other qualities. It manifests itself without difficulty. Its pure doctrine has no need of elaborate proofs, reasonings, or study. It enters, through the power of the Spirit, into the mind, and discovers itself by its own brightness. It seizes the conscience, and silences the vain cavils of passion. Other books are debased by obscure and confused sentiments and positions; this is pure and luminous, in all essential points, as heaven itself.

Nor is this all. It is next spoken of as **ETERNAL**. The laws of men are mutable. Even the ceremonial law, though divinely revealed, yet being designed only for a time, was abolished when Christ appeared. But the word of God, in all its main and essential characters, as leading to the habitual fear of his name, *endureth for ever*. The obligations of revealed truth are perpetual. They vary not with times and circumstances. The blessings of it, the rewards, the effects are unchangeable. The moral precepts of God are immutable. The life proposed by the Gospel, and the redemption which it reveals, are eternal. Heaven in which it terminates will know no end. *He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever*.

These, then, are the properties of the sacred Scriptures; and they all combine to impress

upon us the AUTHORITY of divine truth. The several expressions to which we have adverted—*law, testimony, statutes, commandments, fear, judgments*,—all tend to enforce on us a most reverential sense of the importance and weight of Holy Scripture. It is not a vain thing. Religion is not a matter left to our choice. The Sacred Writings are not to be perverted or rejected at our pleasure. They come with a divine commission, and speak to us in the name of God.

But properties of themselves are of little moment, unless they appear in correspondent effects.

Let us proceed then to consider,

II. THE SURPRISING EFFECTS WHICH THE WORD OF GOD PRODUCES.

It produces conversion, wisdom, joy, illumination, and fear.

IT CONVERTS THE SOUL. “The word of God,” says a Prelate of our Church, “is perfectly adapted to convert, restore, and bring back the soul from error to truth, from sin to righteousness, from sickness to health, from death to life, as it convinces of sin, holds forth the Saviour, is a means of grace and a rule of conduct.” The first thing which man needs as a fallen creature, is an entire conversion of the soul. This the Sacred Scripture, by the power

of the Holy Spirit, is able to effect. It begins, where our necessities begin, with the heart, and brings it back directly to God. It proclaims the holy law which condemns every transgression. It displays the depravity of our nature. It exhibits the astonishing scheme of redemption in the death of the incarnate Saviour; and then invites us *to repent and be converted, that our sins may be blotted out*. Thus men are actually *turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God*. They are *pricked to the heart* under the sense of their guilt and danger, and *cry out* in anguish, *What shall we do?* They then hear the invitations of mercy in the Gospel; obey these invitations; and believe on the name of Jesus Christ. They *confess and forsake their sins, that they may find mercy*. Thus, by the grace of God attending the Holy Scriptures, a radical change is effected, in the thoughts, desires, affections, pursuits, and conduct of men, who were before wicked and worldly; and they begin to hate sin, to believe in Christ, to love God, to love their neighbour, and to live a life of holiness, spirituality, prayer, humility, and good works.

But the Bible not only thus acts upon the heart of man generally, but it acts thus in the case of the most simple and ignorant. It is said to MAKE WISE THE SIMPLE. The ignorant and unlearned, who are most exposed to delu-

sion, and for whom the writings of philosophers and moralists are little adapted, by receiving humbly the word of God, become *wise unto salvation*. They learn their sinfulness; they learn to repent; they learn the way of salvation in Christ Jesus; they discover the source of strength and grace; they learn to lead a holy life. Such learning is real wisdom. It regards the highest interests and the highest duties of man. It chooses the noblest end, and pursues it by the best means. However confined the mind or limited the acquirements of the true penitent, the *entrance of God's word giveth light, it giveth understanding to the simple*,—to those whom human reason would bewilder in error and uncertainty. Pride is not the way to knowledge: he who loves the Bible understands it: faith is the most sure science of man.

I am far from intending to insinuate that the aid of human learning, and of a sound and well-ordered criticism, is not important to every Christian who has the opportunity of making such acquisitions. Much less would I be understood to say that this aid is not essential to the right understanding of many difficult passages of Scripture, and to the right explication of it by the ministers of the church of God. But I mean distinctly to assert, that, as to the broad and commanding lessons and topics of Scripture, the most unlettered and simple may

become *wise unto salvation*, as well as the best informed and most learned; that *to the poor the Gospel is preached*; nay, that it frequently pleases God to *hide these things from the wise and prudent, and to reveal them unto babes*.

After conversion, naturally follows joy. *The statutes of the Lord*, it is said, *are right, REJOICING THE HEART*. For he who knows a Saviour has a claim to joy. He may well rejoice in the mercy which has been displayed to him. He may well rejoice in the gift of righteousness, in the peace of forgiveness, in the blessedness of reconciliation. There is a joy in all the commands and promises and ways of his Saviour; a joy of dependence, of expectation, and of obedience. If a man is not really converted by the Holy Scriptures, he will live, as it were, on the mere surface of the Gospel, and of course will find no scriptural joy. But the penitent discovers in the Scriptures a constant theme of delight; and in this he indulges in proportion to his real attainments in true religion.

For the sincere student of the Bible will advance in knowledge, as well as joy. *The commandment of the Lord*, it is added, *is pure, ENLIGHTENING THE EYES*. It not only makes the simple practically wise, but it furnishes him with an understanding of spiritual things. When the heart has been set right as to the main points of salvation, the judgment still requires

to be directed and illuminated on many of the momentous questions, which have been at first only generally apprehended. Wisdom directs us to pursue the highest end of man, everlasting salvation. Knowledge makes us acquainted with the various facts and instructions by which the practical judgment may be directed. Wisdom regards the state of the heart, illumination that of the understanding. The Bible is the means of giving both. The Christian, as he goes on to study it, is *filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. The eyes of his understanding are enlightened more and more to know the hope of his calling.* The Bible is the remedy of his remaining errors and mistakes. It resembles, as I have already said, the light in its purity and brightness. It unfolds to the mind the works and dispensations of God, the state of man, the nature of sin, the glory of Christ, the doctrine of justification by faith only; the temptations of Satan, the corruption of the heart, the supports of prayer, the harmony and dependence of different truths on each other, the right use of encouragements, warnings, promises, consolations, terrors, with all the details of moral principles and duties. Thus the word of God dispels darkness from the mind, and sheds over it a spiritual and heavenly light. It is a *light unto our feet, and a lamp unto our path*, in all the ramifications of practical duty and all the

intricacies of conflicting opinions. Through *its precepts we get understanding, and therefore hate every false way.*

There remains one other effect of the Holy Scriptures, which includes all the preceding, and is necessary to the due apprehension of them—**THE FEAR OF THE LORD.** This expression appears to be used in this place, by a figure common in Holy Writ, for the *doctrine or commandment which produces the fear of the Lord*; and it seems to sum up all the previous commendations of the Scriptures; so that the Bible itself is nothing else, if I may use so strong a figure, but the *Fear of the Lord*. This fear is indeed *the beginning of wisdom*, the fruit and evidence of conversion, the guardian of joy, the guide to knowledge. All religion may be comprehended under it. A holy, filial, reverential fear of God, which acknowledges the divine majesty, bows to the divine will, receives the revelation of mercy in a Saviour, trembles at the approach of temptation, employs diligently all the means of grace, dreads provoking God, examines itself, walks circumspectly, and works out its own salvation with a holy solicitude—such a fear is the very life of all religion; nay, it is religion itself. It well consists with all the joys and privileges of the Gospel; and indeed is at once the best preservative of those blessings, and the best evidence that they are scriptural: whilst without it

our faith is dead, our hope delusive, our knowledge vain, our profession hypocritical. This blessed principle the Bible can produce, and the Bible only. Human laws may infuse a terror which may restrain the hands, but not an ingenuous fear which sways the heart. The Bible subjects the inner man, makes him love his dependence, acquiesce in the will of the glorious God, adore his majesty, and see his infinite right to the obedience of his creatures.

Such are some of the surprising effects of the word of God, which should impress us with a sense of its EFFICACY, as the considerations suggested under the first head filled us with a conviction of its authority. It is indeed the *incorruptible seed of everlasting life*. It is the *sword of the Spirit*. It is that by which the grace of God first *begets us again* to a heavenly life, and then *sanctifies us wholly, body, soul, and spirit*. It contains all the truth which the ministers of God's word expound in their instructions, and which the Holy Ghost teaches in his divine operations on the heart. It is not only the law of truth, but the instrument of salvation.

It is observable, that in the Psalmist's commendations of the works of creation in the verses which precede the text, no mention is made of any effects produced by them. The heavens pour out a discourse with an overflow-

ing voice. They present to the eyes of men the great volume of nature, for them to read therein the glory of God. The sun has his station as in a royal tabernacle, and goes forth as a bridegroom for beauty and as a hero for strength. But no effects are described as following from them. It is only when we come to the law of the Lord that we hear of conversion, wisdom, joy, illumination, and fear.

I proceed next to consider,

III. THE HIGH AND AFFECTIONATE REGARD WHICH WE SHOULD PAY TO THE HOLY SCRIPTURES. — *More to be desired are they than gold, yea than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and the honey-comb.*

With respect to their value, they are more precious than gold; whilst for delight, they are sweeter than honey. In the first point of view, they are the objects of our esteem; in the second, of our love.

AS TO ITS VALUE, THE WORD OF GOD IS MORE PRECIOUS THAN GOLD. This is a consequence of what has been already stated. For, if the Scriptures possess such excellent qualities, and are capable, under the influences of the Holy Spirit, of producing such astonishing effects, then *the merchandise of them must be better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.* The penitent who has

felt the authority of divine truth, and who has experienced its transforming virtue, will necessarily esteem it above all earthly riches. For, *what shall a man be profited, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?* Observe how men in general value gold; with what diligence they acquire it, with what care they preserve it, with what sorrow they lose it. And shall not a Christian much more value his Bible? Do not the Scriptures contain *durable riches and righteousness?* Do they not relate to spiritual and unseen and eternal blessings? Do they not regard the soul? Do they not reveal the way of salvation? Do they not open *all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, yea, the unsearchable riches of Christ?* And shall he not count *all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord?* Can this saving knowledge be gotten for gold, or can silver be weighed for the price thereof? Can it be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx or the sapphire? Can the gold or the crystal equal it; or can the exchange of it be for jewels of fine gold?

But it is not enough to esteem the Holy Scriptures; we must love them,—FOR DELIGHT, THEY MUST BE SWEETER THAN HONEY AND THE HONEY-COMB. How emphatic are these expressions! In the preceding clause, the value of gold was heightened by the words, *fine gold*,

and, *much fine gold*. But even this fell short of conveying the full meaning of the Psalmist. Men may highly esteem what they are still unable to love. But the word of God is not only to be esteemed as gold, but to be delighted in more than the most refined pleasures of sense. Honey, proverbial as it is for its sweetness ; yea the honey-comb, or, as it is in the margin, *the droppings of honey*, that which flows of itself and bursts from the comb, and is therefore most clear and refined—is but a faint image of the treasure which the Christian finds in the Holy Bible. *He esteems the words of God's mouth more than his necessary food. His soul is satisfied thereby as with marrow and fatness, whilst his mouth praises God with joyful lips.* Yes, there is a delight in the prospect of salvation, in the discoveries of faith, in the contemplation of the promises, in the intimacies of communion, which no words can express. There is not only the knowledge of Christ, but the *savour of that knowledge*, in the sacred Volume. The name of the Redeemer is as *ointment poured forth*. *All his garments smell, as it were, of myrrh and aloes and cassia out of the ivory palaces whereby they have made him glad.* Such language expresses the joy of the Christian in the knowledge of his Saviour, the relish and repose and refreshment and reviving of soul which he derives from the knowledge of him ; and therefore the

delight with which he loves the *word of the truth of the Gospel*. This is a point, I am aware, which worldly persons can little understand. They have never felt the burden of their sins, and never been converted and enlightened by the means of the Holy Volume; and therefore have never been in circumstances to experience this delight in the words of pardon and salvation. Like persons with a diseased taste, the sweetest food has no relish to them. But the fact is not, on this account, either the less true or the less important, that, to the awakened and illuminated mind, there is an inexpressible savour and unction and fragrance in the truths of the sacred Scriptures.

But this leads me, in conclusion, to apply the whole of what has been said, by

I. INQUIRING WHAT WE OURSELVES KNOW OF THE WORD OF GOD, AND WHAT EFFECTS IT HAS PRODUCED UPON US.

Have we submitted to the AUTHORITY of Holy Scripture? Have we read and prayed over our Bibles? Do we implicitly bow to the authority of revelation? Do we see that the word of God is *perfect* and *sure* and *right* and *pure* and *eternal*? Do we silence the vain reasonings of our corrupt hearts, and simply follow the teaching of the Sacred Volume? Or, instead of doing this, do we satisfy ourselves with

loose and general notions about religion? Do we follow the fashionable standard of opinion around us, and virtually disregard or deny the authority of revealed truth?

What are the EFFECTS which the Bible has produced in us? Supposing that we read our Bibles, which I will now take for granted, let me inquire if we read them seriously and practically, with the express design of saving our souls? Have they been the means of turning us from sin and folly to God? Have they made us wise unto salvation? Have they communicated to us a holy joy? Have they enlightened our eyes? Have they implanted and nourished in us the fear of the Lord?

If they have not done something of all this for us, I need not ask what VALUE you put on them. I need not ask whether you *desire them more than gold, and find them sweeter than the honey-comb*. Alas! in this case you are as yet dead to God and religion. No book is probably so dull and uninteresting to you as the Bible. No book so little prized, and so little read. Whilst the royal Psalmist esteemed so highly the small portion of the Scriptures which was extant when he wrote the words of my text, and which was probably little more than the five books of Moses; you disregard the Sacred Volume, now that it contains the full and perfect revelation of the will of God. You are ready

to part with the true riches for the earthly mammon, and to barter away the joys of salvation for the gratifications of sense. But beware: the very Bibles which are in your houses condemn you: the very blessings of revelation increase your guilt: your negligence and unbelief have this aggravation in them, that you sin against light. Awake then to your duty. *Receive not the grace of God in vain.* Cast not behind you the invitations of mercy. Consider the plain and striking language of the text. Consider what it states of the PROPERTIES and EFFECTS and VALUE of the Holy Scriptures. Never be satisfied till you have cordially admitted their AUTHORITY and felt their EFFICACY; and then you will begin to understand their VALUE. To this end, implore the teaching and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Beseech him to illuminate your eyes by his heavenly light *to see the wondrous things of God's law.* Quench not his holy motions; retire from the noise of the world to meditation and prayer; sanctify the Sabbath; attend with seriousness the public worship of God. *Hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest* the portions of Holy Writ which abound in our Liturgical services. *Receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your soul.* Thus shall you know yourself and your lost condition. Thus shall you discover your ignorance and folly. Thus shall you feel

your weakness and insufficiency. Thus shall you be directed to the way of pardon, peace, wisdom, and joy.

But I turn from these exhortations to the impenitent, that I may,

II. URGE THE SINCERE CHRISTIAN TO A MORE DEVOUT REGARD TO THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

The little progress we make in religion is very much to be ascribed to our comparatively low esteem of the Word of God. We read other books and neglect the Bible. We hear what our fellow-creatures say, and forget the authority of revelation. We listen in some degree to our own vain reasonings and suppositions, and virtually dispute with God. We take this or the other part of Scripture, and neglect insensibly the large remainder. We deduce consequences from the Bible, and consider those consequences as of divine authority, and then substitute them tacitly for the Bible itself. We explain away passages of the gravest import, or pass them over cursorily, because they suit not our system or temper of mind. Thus the authoritative declarations of God are imperceptibly questioned; and what wonder, if the EFFECTS of the Bible upon us are so little like those of the text? Let us then study the Bible with silent reverence, with unlimited subjection of understanding and heart, with deep humility, with

fervent prayer; that it may convert and teach and gladden and illuminate our souls more and more, and that our tempers and conduct may be more and more brought into conformity with its holy doctrine and precepts.—*To the law and to the testimony, if any speak not according to this rule, it is because they have no light in them.*

Thus taught in the book of revelation, let us pray that we may have the disposition and ability to study better the BOOK OF NATURE. The glory of God, which the heavens had previously declared to us almost in vain, we shall now behold. The words and lines of this magnificent volume will be more intelligible. The sun going forth in his strength will lead us more to adore the divine Creator. All nature will have a voice and language to us.

Nor let us cease to labour and pray that the BOOK OF GRACE MAY BE EXTENDED AS WIDELY AS THE BOOK OF CREATION; that in every part of the world, man may be taught by revelation those truths which nature never can reveal, and without which all her instructions must be useless; that, according to the expression of the Apostle of the Gentiles, the sound of the Gospel may, like the light of the natural sun, go out into all the earth, and its words unto the ends of the world; so that wherever the voice of

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nature speaks, and speaks in vain, to fallen man, the voice of revelation may penetrate and restore him to himself and to his God*.

* It is impossible for me not to notice here the labours and success of the British and Foreign Bible Society. The text seems of itself to be a sufficient authority for the widest possible circulation of the Holy Scriptures; so that wherever there are men who need conversion, wisdom, joy, and illumination; the law of the Lord—that perfect, sure, right, perspicuous, and eternal standard of truth—should be disseminated among them.

SERMON II.

THE CROSS OF CHRIST THE DISPLAY OF THE
DIVINE GLORY.

1 CORINTHIANS, I. 22—24.

For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

THE doctrine of our Lord's sufferings and atonement is the fundamental truth of Christianity. But it is at the same time the truth which is most opposed to the pride of the human heart. Men are prone to establish their own righteousness and to rely on their own wisdom; and therefore despise and reject the humiliating truth which overthrows both. It has been thus in every age. But it was more especially so among the luxurious and learned Corinthians at the first promulgation of Christian-

ity. The Jews scattered amongst that people, required a sign from heaven to introduce a Messiah who should erect a temporal kingdom, and make them victorious over their enemies; whilst the Greeks, who were the body of the inhabitants, sought for the display of human wisdom and philosophy, the ornaments of eloquence, and the charms of address. To the first, therefore, *the preaching of the Cross* was an offence and *stumbling-block*; to the second it appeared as *foolishness*. But still the Apostle was not ashamed of his cause, because he knew that to *them who were called, both Jews and Greeks*, it would appear to be, what it really was, a stupendous exhibition of the power of God and of the wisdom of God.

It will be my endeavour from this text to show, that the Crucifixion of Christ is that mystery of religion in which God mainly displays his POWER and his WISDOM, notwithstanding the weakness and folly which men erroneously connect with this event.

I. THE CROSS OF CHRIST IS THAT MYSTERY OF RELIGION IN WHICH GOD MAINLY DISPLAYS HIS POWER.

I acknowledge indeed, that to the eye of human reason the crucifixion of Christ APPEARS TO BE AN EVIDENCE OF WEAKNESS. I concede this with the Apostle. It is, so to speak, *the*

weakness of God. The divine power is hidden. Many circumstances connected with the appearance of Christ upon earth, were marked by a character of feebleness. *He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.* Especially, his last agony and death were ignominious and mysterious. What power was manifested in the painful and accursed death of the cross? What against the successful accusations of the Jews? What amidst the dying sorrows of the Saviour? What in the crucifixion between two thieves, in the taunts and reproaches of the Jews, and in the confusion and dismay of his few trembling disciples? Is this the Messiah of whom the Prophets spoke? This the Saviour of mankind? This the consolation of Israel? Can we wonder that the Jew, filled with the prejudices of his nation, and estimating the credentials of a Messiah from a false view of the predictions of glory and triumph which were to attend him, stumbled and was offended at the mystery of the crucifixion?

And though the external offence of the Cross has in a great measure ceased among Christians, yet, what may be termed, The doctrine of the Cross, the doctrine which establishes the crucifixion as the only means of pardon, peace, and holiness, in opposition to the works of the law, still appears weak and inefficient to the eye of worldly persons. What, they ask, is there to

reform and justify and sanctify men in this mysterious truth? Why should this be mainly insisted upon? Is not such preaching a feeble and doubtful means of bringing men to religion and the true obedience of God? May not the doctrine be considered as sufficiently implied, though it is not continually insisted on? and are not moral duties, in fact, the only intelligible and efficacious topic of popular instruction? Thus the *cross of Christ* is still a *stumbling-block* to the self-righteous. They still shrink from fully admitting salvation to be of grace. They still consider the laboured details of ethics to be the most promising method of advancing piety. It is still to them a weak and dangerous scheme to preach *nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified*.

But in this mystery there is in truth THE GREATEST DISPLAY OF THE POWER OF GOD.

This will appear if we consider THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE CRUCIFIXION ITSELF. It is weak indeed if you view it only in its external appearances; but not so, if you recollect the moral greatness of the sufferer, who predicted every part of his passion, and yet endured it with perfect willingness; nay, displayed under it all the graces of meekness, resignation, patience, tenderness to his parent, and forgiveness of his enemies—not so, if you call to mind the convulsion of all nature at his death, the preternatural

darkness, the rending of the rocks, the earthquake, and the opening graves—not so, if you remember that in the very midst of his agony, the Redeemer pardoned a dying malefactor; and as he yielded up the ghost compelled the Roman centurion to exclaim, Truly this was the Son of God. If you weigh these extraordinary events, you will begin to perceive the power of the Cross.

But this will be more evident if you consider the END for which his sufferings were endured, an end foretold by all the Prophets since the world began, the redemption of mankind by his offering of himself a sacrifice for sin, *the just for the unjust to bring us to God*. This stupendous design of mercy changes at once our estimate of the whole scene, and leads us to view the crucifixion itself as an illustrious display of divine power. Even on the cross our Saviour really *travelled in the greatness of his strength*. And this fully appeared in HIS RESURRECTION FROM THE GRAVE. Then was our Lord *raised by the glory of the Father*: then was he *declared the Son of God with power*: then did he arise as a triumphant conqueror over death and hell; and the glories of the resurrection reflected a glory on the cross.

But THE POWER WITH WHICH THE APOSTLES WERE ENDUED BY THE HOLY GHOST, again, demonstrates this. They were illiterate and

simple men ; but a divine power fitted them for the high office of preaching the cross of Christ, bestowed on them the miraculous gift of tongues and a supernatural courage, and carried them through all their dangers in testifying the death and resurrection of their Master to a sinful world. Here we perceive the display of the power of God.

But we shall behold it still more clearly if we consider THE PROPAGATION OF THE GOSPEL IN THE WORLD. In this *the excellency of the power appeared to be of God and not of men*. The doctrine was contrary to the commonly received notions of mankind. It opposed all their passions and prejudices. It demanded the renunciation of established customs and habits. It exposed its followers to privations and difficulties. It was preached by men unknown to fame, and in a manner the most artless and unassuming. And yet it spread most rapidly over the whole known world, and established itself on the ruins of Pagan and Jewish superstition. It thus appeared to be the *rod of God's strength, the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth*. "I see the Apostles go forth. Do they bring with them, as worldly conquerors, numerous cohorts ? Do we see in their hands a glittering sword ? Do they employ with ostentation the insinuating arts of the orator ? No. What then are their arms ? The Cross. They set forth, they arrive, they appear, they triumph.

They hold in their hands the oracles of truth, and the false oracles of Satan are silent. They approach, the ark of Dagon and the idols of the nations are overthrown. They preach the King of kings, and the proudest monarchs bow before him. They cause the light of the world to shine, and the darkness of superstition is dispersed. They unfold the standard of salvation, and infidelity sees its banners forsaken. They display the sign of redemption, and the people are saved. In a word, they raise the brazen serpent, and all the wounds which the infernal serpent has inflicted, are healed. What wonders does the powerful virtue of the Cross effect, without borrowing any thing from man * !"

This part of the subject brings the question home to ourselves. The Gospel thus propagated by the Apostles, we have received and profess to obey. If therefore we are true Christians, we know the power of the CROSS IN ITS ACTUAL INFLUENCE ON OUR OWN HEARTS AND LIVES. This influence is, after all, the most astonishing proof of its virtue, and that in which all other proofs end. The doctrine of the crucifixion is eminently *the power of God*, because it is the only doctrine which, being accompanied by the Holy Spirit, changes the heart, overcomes the customs and prejudices and lusts of men, brings

* Duquesné in loc.

them to repentance for sin, and to faith in the atonement of Christ for pardon and justification; which sanctifies and purifies the affections and life, produces the real love of God, consoles and supports us under trouble, strengthens us under fears and weaknesses, and carries us undismayed through the terrors of death. Every true Christian is *crucified with Christ*, and has *the power of Christ resting upon him*.

Nor is there any other way in which the power of God is to be shown in THE FUTURE CONVERSION OF THE WORLD. No other doctrine will be employed in subduing the proud Mohamadan, and in convincing the stubborn Jew, but the preaching of Christ crucified. No other will be the means of overthrowing the various rites and superstitions of Paganism, and of illuminating a dark world. This, and this only, will finally subvert the kingdom of Satan, and confound all his subtle devices and machinations—*Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power*.

Thus is the preaching of the Cross the mystery in which the power of God is stupendously displayed; and this IN OPPOSITION TO EVERY OTHER MEANS FOR SAVING MEN. For what have all other means accomplished? What has ever been done to change the heart and lives of men but by the doctrine of the Cross? What have heathen ethics, or abstract morals, or vain philosophy, or human suasion, or political theories

done to reach and gain the heart? If the Jews should have their sign from heaven, if new miracles were to be performed, if the stumbling-block of the Cross were to be removed, if the doctrines of the self-righteous and worldly could be acted upon to their utmost extent, what would be accomplished? Would all these be *the power of God unto salvation*? What has been ever done by similar methods? Nothing effectual, nothing saving. No. We want no sign from heaven, we want no new miracle; this is our sign, this is our miracle, a crucified Saviour. If the Jew require additional evidence, and be determined not to believe but on the condition of receiving it, we preach to him the Cross as the miracle of the divine power, which ought to be, and which will be when the vail is taken from his heart, more convincing than any merely external interpositions of the Almighty. If the infidel or the worldly professor of Christianity requires something sufficiently powerful and energetic to influence and purify the human heart, we direct him to the dying Saviour, as the most surprising and affecting of all exhibitions of the power of God. This we do, because we are fully convinced of the power of the doctrine of the Cross. It is not a mere letter, but full of might and grace. We believe the miracles which our Lord performed on earth, and these are sufficient for us as to signs. We

see all the prophecies exactly accomplished in his person and sufferings, and this removes the offence of his external weakness. We experience in some measure the power of the Cross in our own hearts, and this does more than any sign from heaven ; it not only takes away the offence of the Cross, it makes that Cross our glory. It renders it, not a rock of stumbling, but the sure foundation of all our hopes. It clothes it, not with scandal and difficulties, but with splendour and victory. We allow indeed that God may still be thought by an ignorant world to act weakly in this way of salvation ; but it is enough for us to know that *the weakness of God is stronger than men, and the foolishness of God is wiser than men.* We wish to have no power, no wisdom, but what spring from the summit of Calvary.

But this brings me to show, as was proposed,

II. THAT THE CROSS OF CHRIST IS THE MYSTERY IN WHICH GOD MAINLY DISPLAYS HIS WISDOM.

The doctrine of it, indeed, APPEARS TO BE FOOLISHNESS. The Greeks, elated with human learning, and accustomed to a proud search after wisdom, could perceive no trait of reason in the doctrine that a man—and far less in the declaration that the Son of God—should die for the sins of the world. It appeared to them, not so much a weak and insufficient means of reforming

mankind, as a foolish and irrational one. Nothing seemed to them more unreasonable than to state, as an eminent reformer expresses it, “that God was mortal, that life was obnoxious to death, that righteousness was covered with the likeness of sin, that blessedness was subject to a curse.” They found also in the manner in which this doctrine was proposed, no turns of wit, no charms of rhetoric, no displays of ingenuity and skill. When therefore they examined whether the doctrine itself was adjusted according to the rules of their philosophy, whether it descanted at large on the highest good of man, and entered profoundly into the causes of things; and perceived that all their accustomed topics of argument were neglected, and that the doctrine of the fall of man, of redemption by the sufferings of Jesus Christ, and of the resurrection of the Saviour from the dead was insisted upon; and insisted upon, not *with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power*; it appeared to them to be foolishness in the abstract, a statement unworthy the least degree of notice. Thus, whilst the Jew stumbled at the Cross through a perverse zeal for the Law, the Greek turned away from it as irrational and absurd.

In like manner, though the wisdom of God in this doctrine may now, in a sense, be admitted by professed Christians, yet the real

meaning and importance of it still appears *foolishness* to those who are not truly enlightened by the Blessed Spirit. *The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* The false wisdom of the world, though professedly Christian, would substitute some other modification of truth for the simple doctrine of the Cross. They who consult merely human reason can see no wisdom in the ignominious death of Jesus Christ. They pervert or abuse the most sober statements of the doctrine founded upon it; and tacitly substitute for it the covenant of works, or mere details of morals, or some scheme of a remedial law. In every age there is a tendency to obscure or neglect or misrepresent the pure truth of the Gospel of Christ. Human wisdom would improve on divine. Only the truly penitent and humble are willing to *become fools that they may be wise.*

Still the cross of Christ is really **THE MOST ASTONISHING DISPLAY OF DIVINE WISDOM.** The designs of wisdom were, in this instance, laid as deep, as the arm of power was lifted high. In human efforts, we seldom see the union in an equal measure of wisdom and power. Where the mightiest force is exerted, prudential considerations are often overlooked. Or, on the contrary, where a consummate wisdom is dis-

cernible, we do not always perceive the full display of power. But in the plans of God, and especially in that before us, we discover the greatest degree of both; it is as much the wisdom of God, as it is his power. *To the principalities and powers in heavenly places is made known by the church the manifold wisdom of God. In the cross of Christ, God hath abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence. The Apostles in declaring it, preached the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom; which the angels desire to look into.*

Something of this will appear if we consider THE PERSON OF THE CRUCIFIED SAVIOUR. To have *laid help upon one that was mighty*, to have given his only begotten Son to be made man; to have found out a way in which the human and divine nature might be united in one mysterious person; to have made this union of the two natures in Christ, the foundation of the reconciliation of God and the fallen creature; to have discovered a method in which God might suffer, and suffer in the same nature which had sinned; to have united finite with infinite, omnipotence with weakness, immortality with mortality, is beyond all question the highest evidence of wisdom.

THE PREPARATION OF THE WORLD FOR THE COMING OF CHRIST, AND ESPECIALLY FOR HIS OFFERING HIMSELF A SACRIFICE FOR SIN, discovers

the supreme wisdom of God. The longer any great design is in preparation, and the more numerous the expedients and events, which, though apparently unconnected, yet all tend to the production of a common end, the greater is admitted to be the skill of the contriver. Now, in the measures which for four thousand years were preparing for the mysterious sacrifice of the Cross, what wisdom is manifested! The gradual revelation of this mystery from the first dawn of promise in the garden of transgression, to the full blaze of light in the predictions of Isaiah and Malachi, is an evidence of this. The successive dispensations of the covenant of grace to Adam and Noah and Abraham and Moses; the separation of a particular person as the father of the faithful and the progenitor of the Messiah; the selection, first of Jacob, and then of Judah, from the descendants of Abraham; the whole economy of Moses, calculated in the highest degree to preserve the memory of the original promise—are all manifestations of the wisdom of God. Such also is the institution of sacrifices, as a type of the shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ once for all, by which the leading feature of the future Gospel dispensation was perpetually presented to the mind, and an expectation of a real sacrifice maintained.

We may discern a still more remarkable evidence of wisdom in the method by which GOD

SECURES THE INTERESTS OF HOLINESS, AT THE SAME TIME THAT HE PROVIDES FOR THE PARDON OF SIN, BY THE DEATH OF CHRIST. There appeared to be an irreconcilable breach between God and man. Whatever pleas mercy might put in, justice and truth seemed absolutely to overthrow them. Though mercy might sue for the pardon of the transgressor, yet holiness opposed to it the interests of the moral government of God. Now, in the mystery of the cross of Christ, these different claims are adjusted. Justice triumphs in the death of the surety, mercy in the pardon of the transgressor. Justice is honoured in the sufferings of the Son of God, and mercy in the application of those sufferings to the offender. God now deals with our sins in a way of infinite severity, and with our persons in a way of infinite compassion. The greatest hatred of sin and the greatest love to the sinner—eternal love and eternal hatred—are manifested at one and the same time. *God is just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other.* O stupendous display of wisdom! The law and holiness of God as the supreme legislator, are more honoured in the sufferings of the eternal Saviour, than they could have been by the uninterrupted and perpetual obedience of men and angels; and the glory of the divine attributes is

thereby more illustriously exhibited to all intelligent creatures, than if every transgressor had personally endured eternal punishment ! *

But the wisdom of God further appears in THE VICTORY ACHIEVED OVER SATAN IN THE VERY ACT BY WHICH HE APPEARED TO TRIUMPH OVER THE SAVIOUR. Never did the powers of darkness seem to obtain such a victory as in the scenes of Gethsemane and Calvary. Till then the prince of darkness and his angels had trembled before the divine and beneficent power of the Son of God. But, in the crucifixion, they appear to triumph. Satan tempts Judas to betray Christ: he succeeds. He provokes the Jews to demand his crucifixion; the conscience of the Roman governor is overpowered, and the innocent Saviour is condemned. Already the hosts of darkness anticipate the final overthrow of the kingdom of the Messiah. The despised Redeemer is scourged and buffeted and mocked and spit upon. His disciples forsake him and fly. He is nailed to the cross. Thieves are his companions in suffering. He is deserted even by his heavenly Father. The crown of thorns, the nail, the spear, the vinegar, appear all to conspire to accomplish the designs of hell. At last the Saviour gives up the ghost. But in the

* See Charnock on the Attributes; Art. Wisdom of God.

very act in which Satan and his servants appear to subvert the throne of the Messiah, they establish it. The very act which they designed for the destruction of the infant church, redeemed it. In that very act in which they imagined they had undermined the kingdom of Christ, they ruined their own. They did only *whatsoever God's hand and counsel had determined before to be done*. Satan *fell like lightning from heaven*. The Saviour, *through death, destroyed him that had the power of death*. *He spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them on the cross*. Salvation was thus accomplished, the sacrifice was offered, the purchase made, the prophecies fulfilled, and the way opened to the exaltation, and glory, and eternal reign of the Mediator.

The wisdom of God may again be discerned in his having made the SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST, WHICH WERE THE MERITORIOUS CAUSE OF SALVATION, THE EXAMPLE WHICH WE ARE TO FOLLOW. The astonishing transactions of redemption might have been events in which we could discern the power and wisdom of God; but which, like the wonders of creation, we were little concerned to imitate. But is it not an additional display of the wisdom of God, that the Cross is our pattern, as well as our propitiation; that we are *to be crucified with Christ and conformed to his death*, as well as to rely on the atonement

there offered for iniquity? And what can inflame our love and supply such motives to the mortification of sin, as the death of our Saviour? It engages our duty, as much as it secures our happiness. Every act of faith is a spring of love, and *constrains us to live, not unto ourselves, but unto Him that died for us and rose again.*

Another evidence of the wisdom of God in the cross of Christ is, that THE DOCTRINE OF IT IS DESIGNED ESPECIALLY TO COUNTERACT THE VERY SIN BY WHICH MAN ORIGINALLY FELL. Man fell by pride, he is restored in a way of humility. He fell by self-dependence, he is saved by self-renunciation. We lost ourselves by a vain desire after wisdom, we return to God by *the foolishness of the cross.* As we sinned by presumptuous curiosity, the wisdom of God humbles us at the very root of the tree of knowledge; and compels us to renounce the pride of our understanding and submit to faith. Every thing connected with the cross of Christ opposes the reigning evil of our fallen hearts. Human wisdom receives not the doctrine. Human pride comprehends nothing of it. Repentance begins in humility, faith moves in it as its proper atmosphere, claiming nothing but from the undeserved mercy of God; prayer is the breathing of humility, justification is a free gift, salvation is of grace, holy obedience is the fruit of submission. Every

step, every act, every duty, every feeling of a Christian, all is humility. Sin has changed the way to happiness. In the first creation God wished to draw men to the knowledge of himself by the use of their reason, and the consideration of the wisdom of his works. In the second, the Saviour draws men by the folly of the word of the Cross, and by the subjection of their reason and will to the doctrine of faith. Religion is the remedy of human pride, as it is not so much a science of the understanding, as of the heart.

The cross of Christ then is indeed the display of the wisdom of God, and THIS IN OPPOSITION TO ALL THE PRETENDED WISDOM OF THE WORLD. For, *where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.* Whatever a false philosophy may pretend, we want no other wisdom than that of the Cross. All the contrivances of men to improve upon this wisdom, fail. The additions which human reason has made to this doctrine, and the schemes by which it would attempt to accommodate it to human pride, have never succeeded. If the Greek, and those who follow his spirit, demand wisdom, and look for the

exhibition of consummate contrivance; we have none to show them, but the wisdom of the Cross. This we preach as the consummation of divine wisdom—a wisdom rightly estimated in proportion as vain reasonings are silenced, and faith is enthroned in the heart. Let this be accomplished, and the humble penitent begins to discern in the crucifixion of his Lord, the impress of the loftiest intelligence. Then does the Cross no longer appear foolishness unto him, but what it really is, the most stupendous discovery of the eternal counsels of God. Then is he willing to be ignorant of all wisdom, but this wisdom of “Christ crucified.” Then is he willing to be a stranger to every science, but the science of salvation. Then does he discover Christ to be *the power of God, and the wisdom of God.*

From the whole of this subject we may learn,

I. THAT THE PROFESSEDLY CHRISTIAN WORLD MAY BE DIVIDED INTO TWO BODIES, THOSE WHO LOVE AND OBEY THE DOCTRINE OF THE CROSS OF CHRIST, AND THOSE WHO DO NOT. The doctrine of a crucified Saviour is the turning point of Christianity. As men judge of this, they will judge of every thing else in religion. There will necessarily be, therefore, a broad distinction between those who adore the power and wisdom

of God as displayed in it, and all other persons. The humble penitent who understands and feels something of this astonishing subject; who knows in his own case that nothing changes and wins the heart but the grace of the Saviour, who relies on his righteousness, glories in his cross, discerns an unspeakable wisdom in the way of salvation secured by it, and is fully assured that there is no other means of saving others but by leading them into this way, will necessarily be very different in his taste and character and course of life, from those who secretly dislike this whole system of religion, who have never felt their sins, nor their need of salvation; who rely in some measure on their own works, and trust to their own wisdom; and who, though they may acknowledge in a vague manner the mystery of redemption, yet account the undisguised doctrine of the death of Christ for sinners as unnecessary or dangerous.

The momentous question is, To which of these two classes do we belong? Are we self-righteous, proud, wise in our own conceits, trusting in our natural powers or our acquired advantages; deeming our heart good and our state good, and feeling no disposition to be saved as "the chief of sinners," and enter into life through the merits and grace of another; or are we not? Does the language of St. Paul

and of our church on the subject of our original corruption, and the redemption of the Cross, appear to us intelligible and natural? Do we habitually use the expressions of love and admiration, which St. Paul uses, in speaking of the crucifixion of our Lord? Do we perceive in it the most astonishing proofs of matchless wisdom and almighty power? Can we say, *God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ? Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord?*

If you are conscious that you are not thus glorying in the Cross and never have done it, then let me ask you, whether this does not in fact place you in the number of those to whom, in the language of the text, the doctrine of the cross of Christ still appears to be weak and foolish? Let me beg of you to examine your present state. Let me exhort you to distrust yourself, and to pray to God to show you your real character. Let me tell you that a man's very religion, if it be spurious, like that of the proud Pharisee in the parable, may be his ruin. Let me remind you that the Apostle expressly says, that *the preaching of the Cross is to them that PERISH foolishness*. O awful declaration! We perish, if we mistake here. Our eternal happiness depends on our estimate of the death of Christ. Begin then this inquiry; search the

Scriptures; pray for divine illumination; see what your present views of religion have done for you, or rather what they have not done for you; and never rest contented till you have known the power and efficacy, the transforming and enlightening virtue of the cross of Christ. Knowing this, you shall begin to discern in it the *power of God*, in the various respects to which we have adverted, as well as the splendid illustration of his *manifold wisdom*.

But this subject may teach us,

II. NOT TO BE SURPRISED AT THE CONTEMPT WHICH IS CAST ON THE TRUE FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST CRUCIFIED. It is the natural consequence of worldly persons, who are many; forming an estimate of devout Christians, who are few. What say the Scriptures? *Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth unto destruction, and many there be that go in thereat; whereas strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.* Such language might of itself lead us to expect that some reproach would rest on the smaller company. But if we further consider, that the preaching of the Cross—that is, the very truth which the humble follower of his Saviour receives and welcomes and triumphs in—is to the multitude who are lost, a *stumbling-block* or *foolishness*; we need not wonder that reproach

and misrepresentation should follow the servants of Christ. And though men in a Christian country confess nominally the faith of Christ, acknowledge the doctrine of the atonement as a part of the national creed, and freely allow some allusions to it in the course of Christian doctrine, yet if in truth the real doctrine of the Cross is an offence and foolishness in their eyes, they must be expected to brand with some mark of folly or disgrace, those who embrace it, and live agreeably to it. It has been thus in every age. The same contempt which attended our Saviour his Apostles and their immediate followers, will assuredly in a measure be visited upon us, if we imbibe their spirit and tread in their steps. There is only this difference, that in the early days of the church the reproach was cast on Christianity itself, as well as on the professors of it, but that now Christianity is allowed to be right, and the tenets common to it with other religions are admitted to be true, and all the odium is cast on its great and peculiar doctrines. The blow aimed at enthusiasm is in fact meant for religion ; and under an alleged hostility to excess is concealed that fixed abhorrence, which the proud and superstitious, the presumptuous and worldly-minded, feel to the humiliating doctrine of a crucified Saviour. Let us not therefore be surprised if these imputations fall on ourselves, but be prepared for

them; and also prepared to return good for evil, and blessing for reproach, that by *our good works, which they behold, they may glorify God in the day of visitation.*

Finally we are led from this subject,

III. TO BLESS GOD IF WE OURSELVES HAVE BEEN ENABLED TO DISCOVER AND FEEL THE POWER AND WISDOM OF THE CROSS OF CHRIST. It is to the same grace which gave the Saviour to die for sinners, that we are indebted for being brought to a saving knowledge of him. *By the grace of God we are what we are. Not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.* This is implied in an expression of my text to which I have not hitherto expressly adverted; it is *to them that are CALLED*, says the Apostle, that *Christ is the power of God, and the wisdom of God.* We are directed by this language devoutly to attribute any difference between ourselves and others, to the free mercy of God. It is he who *hath called us by his grace; who hath called us according to his purpose; who hath saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.* Let us then ascribe to him all

the praise. Let us glory in any sufferings which may arise from this heavenly vocation. Let us walk worthy of our *high calling of God in Christ Jesus*; and, renouncing more and more our pride and vain wisdom, confine our exultation to that Cross, in which are combined all the displays of God's *power*, and all the *treasures of his wisdom and knowledge*.

SERMON III.

CONVICTION OF SIN.

ACTS, II. 37.

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the Apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

THE first step in repentance is a due sense of our sins. This sense of sin is the beginning of true religion in the heart; and it is substantially the same in all who are converted unto God. Man is a transgressor of the divine law, and till he is deeply sensible of this, he will not forsake his iniquities, or seek for the pardon of them through the atonement of Jesus Christ, or begin a new course of life. The chief object of the Christian ministry, so far as irreligious persons are concerned, should, therefore, be the same with that of the Apostle Peter in the sermon connected with the text, to produce conviction of sin. The circumstances may indeed vary; but the end to be pursued is the same: and it is by the plain statement of truth that God is pleased to impress men with the

sense of their condition and danger. In endeavouring then to explain the nature of that sorrow, or compunction, of mind which is the beginning of real repentance, I shall consider, from the words before us,

I. The instructions which are the means of producing it ;

II. The sorrow or compunction itself ;

III. And the inquiry to which it leads.

I. We are to notice THE INSTRUCTIONS WHICH ARE THE MEANS OF PRODUCING SORROW FOR SIN. It is particularly stated in the text, that the Jews to whom St. Peter addressed his sermon, *When they had heard this*, that is, his declaration that Jesus whom they had crucified was Lord and Christ, *were pricked in their hearts*. The means which God used, therefore, to awaken their minds was the word of truth. St. Peter demonstrated in a plain argumentative discourse that Jesus was the true Messiah : he proved that the gift of tongues was a fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel ; that God had accomplished his own purposes in the death of Christ ; and that the resurrection of Jesus was expressly foretold in the book of Psalms. He boldly declared that he and his brethren were witnesses of this resurrection, and that the miracles which followed were the effects of his exaltation to the right hand of the Father. He then demon-

strated, from the 110th Psalm, that the Messiah was seated on the right hand of God, in order that his *foes might be made his footstool*: and he concluded by affirming, *Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified both Lord and Christ*. Similar was the method pursued by the Apostles in several other sermons recorded in the Acts. They appealed to the Old Testament, which their audience regarded as the *Oracles of God*; they proved from this that Jesus was the true Messiah; they charged upon the Jews the guilt of his death; and then they exhorted them to repentance and conversion. Their instructions consisted of faithful statements of those truths which were best adapted to convince them of their sins, and of bold and forcible appeals to their consciences. Thus numbers *were pricked in their heart*, and *the Lord added to the church such as should be saved*. (Ver. 47.)

In like manner, the preaching of the word of God is, in every age, the usual means of producing sorrow for sin in the minds of the impenitent. Truth is the instrument of conviction. Our congregations are not now, indeed, in the same circumstances with those whom the Apostles addressed. The Saviour does not come in person to them, or work his miracles, or deliver his divine discourses in their presence;

they have not rejected him personally, or given their voices for his crucifixion. The statement of truth therefore, adapted to bring them to repentance, is not exactly the same with that of the Apostles. Ministers now have not the same occasion to prove to them that Jesus is the Christ, nor can they charge them with the immediate guilt of his death. But if men, though called Christians, have neglected this Saviour, have rejected his offers of mercy, have crucified him afresh by their sins, have lived in practical ignorance of his person and work and sufferings and atonement and resurrection and glory; if, though they acknowledge the facts of his history to be true, they know nothing really of his character as Jesus the Messiah; and understand nothing of his grace as Lord and Christ; then they as much need to be taught these fundamental doctrines, as the Jews needed to be told the particular truths to which I have adverted. And it is only so far as instructions such as these are plainly given, that they are likely to be brought to serious piety.

What is it then, my brethren, that you hear in our instructions? You hear that you are immortal creatures, accountable to God for all you do; that God has given you a just and holy law; that this law is spiritual, and demands perfect obedience; that *the soul that sinneth, it shall die*; that you have all broken this law a

thousand times in thought, word, and deed; that some of you have done this by open vice and profligacy, others by covetousness and the love of the world, others by pride and ambition, others by pleasure and indolence, others by indifference and thoughtlessness; and all of you by not *loving God with all your heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, and your neighbour as yourselves.* You hear also, what is a necessary inference from all this, that *there is none righteous, no not one; that by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in God's sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin; that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men; and that the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God.*—This is what you are instructed in.

You hear, besides, that *God has so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life; that repentance and remission of sins are preached in his name among all nations; that he is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him; that whosoever will, may come and take of the water of life freely; that God has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his way and live; and that it is accord-*

ingly the duty of all to consider their ways, and repent and turn to God.

You have heard further that the Holy Ghost is “the author and giver of life,” that by his grace the eyes of men are enlightened and their hearts changed; and that, therefore, by his sacred influences you must be *renewed in the spirit of your mind*, and must humbly devote yourselves to God in a course of faith, contrition, spirituality, love, obedience, and good works.

These truths you hear. And not only so, but, if we are faithful to our office, you hear them applied forcibly to your particular cases. *By manifestation of the truth we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.* Like the Apostles in the discourses we have noticed (and which are recorded for our imitation in treating with unconverted persons, as their Epistles, generally speaking, are our model in preaching to professedly serious Christians), it is our duty to appeal to the heart, to adapt our instructions to the several errors, prejudices, and circumstances of our hearers, to display to them the truth in the plainest and most affectionate manner; aiming to rouse their consciences, to convict them of guilt, and to lead them to repentance and conversion. It is our object to disturb every careless sinner, and make him acquainted with his character and danger. We are anxious to lay open to the se-

cret transgressor his guilt; to strip the mask from the hypocrite; to expose to the covetous man his idolatry; to teach the cavilling objector the broad features of truth; to instruct the self-righteous person in the doctrine of the atonement and righteousness of Christ; and to show the unholy professor of evangelical truth the power and effects of real godliness. In a word, our duty as ministers is *rightly to divide the word of truth*, so that every different class of persons may hear the Gospel in a way most exactly suited, under the blessing of God, to inform their understandings and touch their hearts.

Nor shall such instructions be given in vain; for I am now to point out,

II. THAT THEY WILL PRODUCE SORROW AND
COMPUNCTION OF MIND FOR SIN.

Our text informs us, in the case of the Jews whom St. Peter addressed at the day of Pentecost, that, *When they heard this, they were pricked in their heart*. They were pierced through with grief and confusion. The Apostle's words penetrated their hearts like an arrow, and left a deep wound behind. It was not so much a gradual conviction slowly and reluctantly wrought on their minds, as a sudden and powerful emotion which at once overwhelmed every obstacle. They had been blinded by prejudices, misled by notions of a temporal Messiah, and

inflated with haughty conceptions of their law. They had been stimulated by their priests to demand the crucifixion of Christ, and had joined in the guilt of that unjust and dreadful tragedy. But no sooner did they hear the solemn and convincing appeal of the Apostle, than conviction flashed upon them. Remorse, shame, sorrow, took possession of their minds. They instantly discovered that the person whom they had ignominiously crucified, was their long-promised Saviour. They saw in the miraculous gift of tongues an unanswerable proof that the Messiah was come. The lovely character and beneficent miracles of Christ rushed into their thoughts. They recollected what they had themselves seen and heard of Him. All his purity and benevolence rose like a vision before them. The conviction of their obduracy in rejecting his mission and consenting to his death, burst upon their minds. They felt that they could make no excuse for their crime. They saw no way of escape from the wrath of the Saviour whom they had provoked; and who, as they now believed, was enthroned at the right hand of the Father. Thus *the word of God was*, in their case, *quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword*. They became at once sensible of their folly, ingratitude, wickedness, and blindness; and were touched to the very quick on account of their guilt and danger.

Such was the beginning of true repentance in these Jews; and such the efficacy of divine grace in blessing the words they had heard. It might appear incredible that hearts so hard should be so soon impressed; that they who had lately crucified their Messiah as a blasphemer, should thus sink at once from the height of presumptuous iniquity to the depths of contrition. And in truth the change would be beyond belief, especially when we consider the accumulated evidence of our Lord's personal character and miracles, and the obstinate unbelief of many of the very same Jews when they witnessed them; if we did not know that the Holy Ghost, the purchase of the Saviour's death, had been communicated to remove the veil of pride, prejudice, and sinful affections from their minds. Thus the truth had its due effect in convincing their understandings and piercing their hearts.

Effects of the same kind follow in our own days, the faithful instructions of the ministers of Christ. The conviction of truth indeed is not always so immediate and so powerful; the work of conversion is often slow and imperceptible; and neither the time of its commencement nor the exact steps of its progress can be traced. And it is especially gradual among those who have had the blessing of a religious education, or who have been much accustomed to religious

reading and inquiry. Still the commencement of true repentance is substantially the same in all. Men must be convinced of their sins, or perish. And whether this conviction resemble the sudden alarm of the Philippian jailor, and of the Jews in my text, or the gradual illumination of Cornelius, Lydia, the Ethiopian eunuch, and the Bereans, the results are the same. The careless and wicked are effectually brought to feel their sins and their danger, and to inquire after the way of salvation. They are pricked in their hearts with remorse and confusion, their vain excuses are silenced, they feel their lost condition, they humble themselves in contrition of soul before God; and admit without reserve the charge of guilt and condemnation which his holy law prefers against them.

In many cases, where there has been previously an entirely wicked and ignorant life, truth is more suddenly communicated to the soul. Like the Jews in the text, such men often discover at once, what they never felt before, their extreme danger and misery. The sword of the Spirit lays open their hearts; their mouths are stopped; their sins arise in terrible array before them. They feel for the first time their accountableness, their ingratitude to God, the abuse of their talents, the neglect of their souls, the wickedness of their hearts and affections. They compare them-

selves with the spiritual standard of God's law, and conviction of sin breaks in upon their minds with the brightness of a sun-beam. They feel that their former lives have been full of rebellion, vanity, and ungodliness; that their best deeds have been polluted with evil, their merits demerits, their virtues a mask, their religion a form. Thus *the arrows of God stick fast in them*. Pain, and grief, and perplexity, and alarm agitate and rend their minds.

Whether the manner, however, of this conviction of sin be sudden or gradual, the essential point is to feel our transgressions with deep sorrow and compunction of heart. This is the beginning of true repentance. This forms the broad distinction between a careless, worldly, wicked man, and a lowly and teachable one. Such was the change in Manasseh when *he humbled himself before God in the time of his affliction*; such was it in Josiah, whose *heart was tender*; such in Zaccheus; such in Mary Magdalen; such in the woman of Samaria; such in the Apostle Paul. In all these cases, there was a poignant grief for their iniquities as committed against God.

And here let us stop, and inquire if we have ever thus felt the weight of our sins. Religion is a personal concern. Have we, then, discovered and confessed our own transgressions against God? Do we know what it is to weep

for our rebellion and enmity of heart? Is sin *a heavy burden, too heavy for us to bear?* Did we ever mourn for it as unspeakably odious and abominable? When we hear the word of God read or preached, does it convince and affect our minds? If it does not, O let us implore the illumination and grace of the Holy Spirit, that such an effect may be produced! It is by his influence alone that our hard hearts can be changed. It is in vain for me to proceed with this discourse if there be no impression on our souls. I shall *strive as one that beateth the air*. Let us then pause, and fervently beg of God to “*cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit;*” and *to take away the heart of stone out of our flesh and give us an heart of flesh*; that thus we may have a right judgment and feeling of this important subject, and be touched with penitence for our unnumbered offences against God.

But I proceed to notice,

III. THE INQUIRY TO WHICH REAL COM-
PUNCTION FOR SIN WILL LEAD.

The converts in the text are described as saying *unto Peter and the rest of the Apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?* This was the spontaneous language of an awakened mind. When the understanding is informed, and the heart changed, the inquiry will imme-

diately be, *What shall we do?* Thus the jailor at Philippi fell at the Apostles' feet and said, *Sirs, what shall I do to be saved?* Thus St. Paul at his conversion, when Jesus met him by the way, said, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* The various classes of persons also who heard John the Baptist are represented as inquiring, *Master, what shall we do?* These various persons, like the Jews in proposing the question of my text, appear to have been anxious to do any thing or suffer any thing which might be prescribed to them; and to renounce their prejudices and their vices, if only they might obtain relief from their alarm and perplexity, and escape the impending danger.

Thus, in all cases of true conversion to God, compunction for sin will lead to diligent inquiries after a way of escape. The sinner, *pricked to the heart*, will apply with seriousness to the ministers of God's word to receive further directions in the road to heaven. So long as men are proud and unconcerned about practical religion, they are well contented to follow their own opinions, or the commonly received opinions of their day. They feel no anxiety for better instruction. They are satisfied with general notions of religion. But not so, when they are in some measure convinced of their sins. They are then anxious to be led in the only way of salvation. They

apply with earnestness to the ministers of God, and seek with fervent importunity the path to pardon and holiness.

Such inquiries, then, are like that of the Jews before us, THE EXPRESSION OF ALARM. What will become of us? Whither can we flee? How can we *escape the damnation of hell*? Tell us what we shall do in our deplorable case. We see that we have ruined ourselves. We see that sin is a very different thing from what we considered it to be. We apprehend the just and awful condemnation of the law of God. Show us then in what manner we can be delivered from the pit into which we are fallen. How mad a part have we acted! How dreadful a punishment have we incurred! How holy a God have we provoked! What shall we do to be saved?

The degree of alarm which may accompany this conviction, will differ in different cases, and is no infallible measure of the sincerity of the change. This alarm may also seize the sinner more suddenly in some instances than in others. But in every case the inquiry of my text will accompany sincere penitence — an inquiry prompted by an affecting sense of danger and ruin. A mere cold and formal investigation of the truths of religion will not satisfy an awakened soul. The case of a convinced sinner is like that of a man seized by a mortal dis-

temper, and alarmed at his imminent danger. It is like that of the traveller overtaken by the night in an inhospitable wilderness, and inquiring with breathless anxiety for a guide to direct his steps. It is like that of a shipwrecked mariner cast on a desert shore, and seeking for some way of deliverance. Cold and formal reasoning merely, is out of place in circumstances, where the soul and eternity are felt to be at stake. No man could behold with calculating indifference his house perishing in the flames. The manslayer under the law would not fly to the city of refuge with a hesitating foot. Nor will the sinner *pricked to the heart* with the words of truth, tamely postpone the business of salvation, or coldly descant upon it. Like Lot, he will *escape for his life, and not tarry in all the plain; but escape lest he should be consumed*. The best reason, in such an emergency, is earnestness; the best argument, a contrite heart; the best interpreter, conscience; the best guide, the Bible. Discussion makes way for feeling; doubt, for decision; speculation, for solicitude and prayer.

But the question to which our attention is now turned, is not merely the question of alarm, it is also THE LANGUAGE OF TEACHABLENESS. When the Jews said unto *Peter and the rest of the Apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?* they felt something more than

mere distress, they felt a desire for instruction ; they declared themselves willing to be led in any way that God might appoint, they desired to submit to the teaching and guidance of the Apostles, whom God had evidently distinguished by the gift of miraculous powers, and whose convincing arguments had already forced, as it were, their consent, and filled them with dismay. Nor is their case peculiar. Do we not constantly perceive that one mark of a salutary perturbation of conscience is a desire to be taught ? Nothing can be effected while men are *wise in their own conceit*. If they make any inquiries about religion in that spirit, they infallibly relate to some speculative point, or are designed to evade a closer application of truth, or are employed to persuade the person to whom the inquiry is directed, of a sincerity in religion which is far from being really felt. But when men are in earnest about their souls, and are *pricked in their hearts*, they soon begin to hold another language. They then inquire about religion with a real desire to learn ; they are ready to renounce their former obstinacy ; they admit the accusations of conscience and the force of truth ; they receive the advice and instruction of ministers ; they read their Bibles with an honest wish to know the will of God in order that they may perform it ; they pray fervently to God for illumination and strength,

and they ask of all around them the way to heaven. Their language is, What shall we do? Put us on any plan of escape, and we are willing to adopt it. Demand of us any sacrifice, and we will cheerfully make it. Prescribe any duties, and we will undertake them. Only show us the road, and we are ready to walk in it. This is the language of men penetrated with the importance of religion, won by the force of invincible reasoning, and constrained by the authority of truth. Men in this state of mind may be dejected indeed for the time, but they are in the way to peace; they are wounded, but God shall bind up their wounds. These terrors shall subside. The anxiety of the soul shall be satisfied. The penitent inquirer, as in the case of the Jews in the text, shall receive further instructions from the *stewards of the mysteries of God*.

And here I am naturally led in drawing towards a conclusion, to advert,

I. TO THE DIRECTIONS WHICH ARE TO BE GIVEN TO THE PERSONS WHOSE CASE WE HAVE BEEN DESCRIBING. These may be best collected from the answer of St. Peter to the inquiry of my text; *Then Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Did*

the awakened Jew ask, what he shall do? The answer was, *Repent*; let the alarm which he has felt, lead him to an entire repentance and conversion to God—*And be baptized*; let him publicly unite himself to the church by the open dedication of himself to God in his appointed sacrament—*For the remission of sins*, which is to be obtained through that Saviour alone in whose name he is to be baptized, and which will be sealed and confirmed to him in that ordinance—*And he shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost*, if not in his extraordinary, yet in his enlightening and sanctifying influences.

The exhortation, then, as addressed to professed Christians, who have already been admitted by baptism to the privileges of the visible church, may be considered as relating to REPENTANCE, PARDON, CONFESSION OF THE NAME OF CHRIST, and THE GRACE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. In proportion as these Christian graces and gifts are imparted to the mind, will our convictions of sin have their full and proper effect. Let men have *repentance towards God, which needeth not to be repented of*; let them be *found in Christ, not having their own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is of God by faith*; let them join themselves to the Church in an open confession of their faith, and devout use of the sacraments, and other

means of grace ; and let them be sanctified and comforted by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and they will be real Christians ; the lessons of the Gospel will have accomplished their end, the wounded heart will be healed, and the eager expressions of alarm and inquiry will gradually be exchanged for the language of assurance and peace and joy.

These directions, then, may be viewed both in the light of an ENCOURAGEMENT and of a CAUTION.

They are an ENCOURAGEMENT, as they present a way of escape to the anxious inquirer. Is it no relief to the convinced mind to be told there is a Saviour, to be assured of acceptance, to be directed to the Divine Spirit for the communication of wisdom and strength ? Is it no encouragement to be taken as it were by the hand, and guided to heaven ? Is it no consolation to be led to the mysterious Cross, and instructed in the doctrine of the remission of sins ? Be comforted, then, distressed and perplexed penitent. Salvation is before you. However little light or feeling you may now have, go on ; press forward ; repent ; confess the Saviour ; seek for pardon ; implore sanctifying grace. If you have only a good thought towards God, or some misgiving of mind about your own condition, cherish it, yield to it, follow it as the dawning light. On the other

hand, if your terrors are ever so penetrating, and your apprehensions ever so vivid, do not despair. Though you should conclude your sins to be more numerous and more aggravated than those of any other person, though you should be struck to the heart with self-condemnation, and be almost ready to conclude that your particular case is beyond the reach of mercy, still be not overwhelmed. The door of repentance and pardon is open. The invitation is general, *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money.* The alarm and distress you feel are so far from being arguments against you, that they rather prove you to be in the right way. The Jew who had heard the Apostle's sermon, and who was *pricked to the heart*, and said with anguish, *What shall I do?* was in fact in the path to truth and salvation; and so are you, if your feelings are such as his, and you will follow the directions of the sacred word. Yield not then to unbelief; for all things are ready, and none are excluded from the feast of mercy. You are invited and commanded to approach. Nor will God reject a single soul that comes to him in the name of Jesus Christ.

The directions, however, of the Apostle afford also a CAUTION, as they show that repentance and remission of sins, and a public

dedication of ourselves to the service of Christ, are necessary to complete what alarm of conscience may have begun. It is necessary not only to guard against despair by stating the gracious invitations of the Gospel; but to caution men against presumption by enforcing the necessity of complying with those invitations. It is possible for them to be terrified at their sins for a time, and yet not to be turned from them. They may dread the consequences of transgression, and yet continue to love it. Conviction of sin must, then, be embodied, as it were, in all the acts of the true and practical Christian character. You must be cautious of trusting to any alarm of mind, as though in itself a sufficient evidence of a state of salvation. You may clearly see from the exhortation of the Apostle to the Jews to *Repent and be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus for remission of sins*, that distress of conscience is one thing, and repentance and pardon another. There are persons who conclude they are true Christians because they have been much affected by a sermon, and have been for a time under terror of mind; but such sensations are no decisive proofs of conversion. There must be something besides conviction; even repentance, faith in the merits and death of Christ, the influences of grace, and holy

obedience, to prove that we are truly accepted of God. Alarms indeed may, and ought to end in our being truly awakened from the sleep of sin—this is their proper effect—but they may prove to be only like the disturbance given to one in profound slumber, at which he starts for a moment, but, overcome by his sleep, again sinks down to repose. Let us not, therefore, substitute convictions of conscience, which are chiefly valuable as they lead to something further, for that solid conversion to God without which no one can be saved; but let us, when we hear the word of the Gospel, and *are pricked in our hearts*, follow on from feeling to practice, and so implore the grace of God, that we may become true believers in the atonement and righteousness of the Saviour; and sincerely dedicated to his service and honour.

To confirm you still more in this solid work of religion, let me, before I conclude,

II. Turn your attention for an instant, to THE DIRECTIONS PROPER FOR THOSE WHO HAVE ALREADY REPENTED AND OBEYED THE GOSPEL. These may be drawn from the remaining exhortation of the Apostle to his converts, and from the narrative of their conduct and spirit, contained in the verses which follow my text. I can only allude to them. Let the Christian,

then, aim at that holy separation from the world, to which the Apostle exhorted them when he said, *Save yourselves from this untoward generation.* Let him be unmoveable in his profession of the Gospel, after the example of these converts, who *Continued steadfast in the Apostle's doctrine and fellowship.* Let him cultivate gratitude to God, charity and benevolence towards others, and cheerfulness and simplicity as to his own character; even as they *Praised God* for his mercies, *parted their goods to all men, and did eat their bread with gladness and singleness of heart.* And, to these holy and devout exercises, let him ever add his *fervent prayer* that numbers may be gathered into the spiritual church; that faithful ministers may be raised up to imitate the boldness, and convincing reasoning and undaunted appeals of the holy Apostle; that many, hearing the word of truth, may be *pricked in their hearts*, be led to serious inquiry as to their salvation, and never rest till they have truly repented and obeyed the Gospel; that the numbers of such converts may recal to our minds those days of the Spirit, when three thousand souls were in one day joined to the infant church; and that, to this end, God may grant us primitive faith and zea primitive fervour in prayer and preach-

ing, primitive love to Christ, and primitive measures of the sanctifying grace of the Holy Ghost: so that *the Lord* may both increase continually the piety of his faithful servants, and *add* to their body *daily* such as shall be *saved*.

SERMON IV.

TRUE REPENTANCE.


ZECHARIAH, XII. 10.

And I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications; and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born.

THE necessity of repentance is established in every part of Scripture. It is the first duty of a sinner under a dispensation of mercy; prepares for a right reception of Christ as a Saviour; and is a part of that new and holy course of life which every true Christian leads. It accompanies, indeed, every other exercise of piety, and terminates only when we arrive at heaven. Its extent and spirituality, its connexion with faith and salvation, the way in which it is to be obtained, and the effects which it produces, are all points of the first moment. On many of them the text which I have read will afford us

instruction. It contains a very remarkable prediction of the repentance and conversion of the Jewish nation. This was in part fulfilled when the Spirit of grace was poured out on the Christian church at the day of Pentecost, and many of those who had crucified the Son of God, *looked to Him whom they had pierced*: but it will be accomplished in its fullest sense, when *the vail shall be taken from the heart* of that interesting but obdurate people, and *all Israel shall be saved*. It cannot, however, be reasonably doubted that the promise contained in it, like many others expressed in similar terms, respects the whole church of Christ, and is continually fulfilled in the case of every particular revival of religion, and of every individual conversion to God. It is in this point of view that I intend to consider it; and it will be my object to illustrate from it three particulars connected with true repentance.

- I. The source from which it flows ;
- II. The means by which it is produced ;
- III. The effects of it in the life and character of the penitent.

I am to consider, then,

I. THE SOURCE FROM WHICH TRUE REPENTANCE FLOWS.

If true repentance imply, as it evidently does in Scripture, an entire change of heart,

comprehending a genuine sorrow for sin as committed against God, a hearty forsaking of it, and an acceptance of God's mercy as revealed in Jesus Christ, then it is obvious that it must spring from the influences of divine grace. Accordingly, in the prediction of the repentance of the Jewish nation before us, the source of it is first spoken of—*I will pour upon the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications.* The allusion is to the pouring out of water, which is an usual emblem for the bestowing of the influences of the Holy Ghost. The image is most natural and just; for, refreshing as water to the thirsty, is the grace of the Holy Spirit to the church of God. Such language is common in the Prophets. One example may suffice: *I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring.* Isa. xlv. 3. The plentiful measure also of the grace bestowed is implied in this striking image. The POURING out the Spirit conveys the idea, not of a small and inconsiderable blessing, as of a few drops only; but of *showers of blessings*, as the Prophet Ezekiel expresses it, when the influences of the Spirit shall be granted in rich and copious abundance.

The peculiar effect of the Spirit of God in his operations on the heart, is described in the

titles here given to the Holy Ghost—*the Spirit of grace and supplications* ; that is, the Spirit by whose influence grace is implanted in the mind, and supplications are addressed to the throne of mercy. It is usual in the Sacred Scriptures to describe the different effects and fruits of the Divine Spirit in this brief but pregnant language. Thus we read of *the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, the Spirit of truth, the Spirit of glory, the Spirit of holiness, the Spirit of adoption, and the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ.*

In the words which we are now considering, the Holy Ghost is promised as *the Spirit of grace*, because all grace and holiness proceed from him. There is no grace in the heart of a fallen sinner till he bestows it. We are by nature *dead in trespasses and sins*. It is the power of the Spirit of God which opens the eyes, changes the heart, and turns us truly to God. Then we begin to see our state and danger, and to know our remedy and duty. We are saved by the *sanctification of the Spirit*, we are *born of the Spirit*, we are *led by the Spirit*, we are convinced of our sins by the Spirit; and thus true repentance begins, and is carried on in our souls.

But my text speaks of *the Spirit of suppli-*

cations, as well as the Spirit of grace, because one of the earliest effects of divine influences is prayer. Wherever the Holy Ghost is poured out, this effect appears. Without prayer we cannot live unto God. Amongst the first lessons which we learn in religion is the duty, and honour, and privilege of prayer; and it is only by the secret aid of the Spirit of Christ that we can perform it aright. We may indeed use the language of prayer, we may be present where prayers are offered, we may bow ourselves in the posture of prayer; but genuine and fervent supplication to God is the fruit of divine influence. We pray *in the Holy Ghost*. *We pray always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit. It is the Spirit who helpeth our infirmities, for we know not what to pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*

It is by his sacred instruction that we discover our ignorance, poverty, defilement, misery, and danger. It is by the Holy Spirit we are enabled to understand the nature of that repentance which God requires of us, and to seek for it. It is by his teaching we receive with faith the truths and promises of the Gospel. It is he who excites in us spiritual desires after the blessings thus discovered in the Holy Scriptures. It is he *who glorifies Christ, by taking of the things which are his, and showing them to us.* It

is the blessed Spirit who assists us in every thing connected with prayer. We thus earnestly seek for repentance and every spiritual blessing, and pant after them with intense longings of heart ; and “ desire,” observes an old divine, “ is the proximate cause of prayer.” Thus the sinner, formerly obdurate and thoughtless, is softened and humbled. He now begins to supplicate God ; he *lifts up his soul*, and *cries mightily* unto Him ; he *pours out* his wants before him, *he shows him of his trouble* ; he acknowledges his sins, confesses his guilt, implores the gift of true repentance, forsakes every evil way, and waits humbly upon God.

Thus we see the source of real repentance. The Holy Ghost as a *Spirit of grace and of supplications* produces a return to God and a thorough conversion of heart and life. By the Spirit of grace God prevents the sinner : by the Spirit of supplications he disposes him to pray for salvation. By the Spirit of grace he enables him to know his danger ; by the Spirit of supplication he teaches him to implore deliverance from it. By the Spirit of grace he discovers to him the remedy ; by the Spirit of supplication he enables him to cry fervently for it. By the first he brings him to feel his wants, and by the second to spread them before God. By the Spirit of grace he opens his eyes to see spiritual blessings ; by the Spirit of supplications he in-

clines him to seek for them. By the one he excites holy desires, by the other he leads him to express them. The Spirit of grace reveals God in Christ; the Spirit of supplication applies to this God for an interest in his mercy. Thus genuine contrition and repentance are gradually formed in the heart. But still this is done in the use of the various means which God has appointed; in the employment of which the penitent is constantly taught to entreat the assistance of the Holy Ghost. There is one particular method by which God is pleased to produce this entire conversion of heart, of so high importance, that it may require a distinct consideration.

This leads me to notice,

II. THE CHIEF MEANS BY WHICH REPENTANCE IS PRODUCED—*And they shall look upon me whom they have pierced.*

Repentance, generally speaking, springs from a view of a crucified Saviour. When the Spirit of grace shall be poured on the unbelieving nation of Israel, it is said in the text they will look upon their Messiah whom they pierced and slew; and this sight will be the means of producing deep contrition and sorrow for their sins, and especially for that sin which their ancestors committed, and to which they have ever since been, in a measure, consenting, the crucifixion of

the Lord of glory. In like manner, every true penitent, when he is brought to humble supplication before the throne of God, discovers this astonishing object, and looks unto Him whom he likewise has by his sins *crucified afresh*. And thus he learns true repentance and brokenness of heart.

Before we consider what this sight is, we must observe that the express quotation of the Evangelist fixes the meaning of the words as prophetic of Christ. St. John, after relating the mournful events of our Lord's passion, states that *one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side*; and then adds, *For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled—They shall look on him whom they pierced*. Here he evidently quotes the words of the text, and applies them to our blessed Saviour. “And indeed,” says a pious and learned Prelate, “they cannot possibly be understood of any other person in the world; for none could speak these words but one who was both God and man. That he was God is plain from the former part of the verse, where he saith, *I will pour upon the house of David, &c. the Spirit of grace*; for it is acknowledged by all that the Spirit of grace is not at the disposal of any creature, but that it is only in the power of God to bestow it upon us. And therefore he that here promiseth to pour out his Spirit upon his church, could be no other

than God himself. And then that he was man too appears from the next words, *And they shall look upon me whom they have pierced.* For if he had not been man, he would not have been capable of being pierced by them. And therefore he that spake these words could be no other than Christ himself*.”

The view of this crucified Redeemer, which is spoken of in my text, cannot be understood as a bodily sight with the eye of sense, but as a spiritual and rational contemplation of him by the eye of penitence and faith. Thus, in the Prophet Isaiah, the Saviour speaks of faith under a similar figure, *Look unto me and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth.* Our Lord also, when on earth, said, *As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so shall the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* The Apostle, also, reminds the Galatians, that *Jesus Christ had been evidently set forth before their eyes, crucified among them.* And he exhorts the Hebrews to *consider the Apostle and High Priest of their profession; and to run with patience the race set before them, looking unto Jesus.* In all these passages an act of the mind is described which is fixed upon Christ crucified, and

* Bishop Beveridge's Sermons, vol. vi. page 4, edit. 1712.

which brings that affecting object, and places it, as it were, before our view.

And surely there is no object WHICH IN ITSELF SHOULD SO POWERFULLY ATTRACT OUR NOTICE. Go, penitent, to the Garden of Gethsemane and the hill of Calvary, and see if any sorrow was like unto the sorrow of the dying Saviour. View the surrounding multitude. Mark how they mock the holy Sufferer. Observe the blessed Jesus as he is suspended on the accursed tree. Place yourself under the cross with the weeping Mary. The sun is darkened, the rocks are rent, the graves are opened, the vail of the temple is rent in twain. The Son of God expires. At this moment the soldier draws near—The Saviour is dead already—Still he transpierces him in wanton indignity with his spear. Look, and look again, at the dreadful scene.

But if the very circumstances of the spectacle should fix our attention, still MORE SHOULD WE BE MOVED WHEN WE REFLECT ON THE DIVINE DIGNITY OF THE SUFFERER. It is no mere man whom we see suspended on the cross. It is the *Lord of glory*; it is the *Prince of life*; it is the *King of kings*; it is he who *was with God and who was God*; the brightness of his *Father's glory*, and the express image of his person; *God manifest in the flesh*. Now, if royalty, ignominiously debased, if incarnate Deity suffering as a malefactor, can move your soul to com-

punction, look on this dreadful scene. Be filled with astonishment at the sight. Such a spectacle was never before exhibited. The Son of the Most High suffers, the Author of life dies, the Holy One of God is accursed, Omnipotence bows its head, and gives up the ghost.

But this is not all. You and I, my brethren, HAVE HAD A SHARE IN THIS DEATH. It was not so much the soldier who pierced Christ, as our sins. God *laid on him the iniquity of us all*. This is the true cause of the Saviour's death. He was *delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*. If it had not been for our iniquities, the Father would not have delivered him up to the malice of the Jews. So that, though the sin of those Jews is not in the least lessened by this consideration, still we are to regard them, so far as we are concerned, only as instruments in the hand of Divine Justice. The real primary cause of the Redeemer's sorrows, was sin, our sins, our iniquities. These were the nails, the thorns, the spear which pierced our Lord. *He bore our sins in his own body on the tree*. "In the ordinary course of justice," observes Bishop Andrews, "when a party is put to death, we say, and say truly, that the executioner cannot be said to be the cause of his death, nor the sheriff by whose commandment he does it, nor yet the judge by whose sentence, nor the jury by whose verdict,

nor the law itself by whose authority it proceeded—sin, and sin only, is the murderer. So it is here. It was the sin of our polluted hands that pierced his hands; the swiftness of our feet to do evil that nailed his feet; the wicked devices of our heads that gored his head; and the wretched desires of our hearts that pierced his heart *.” Shall we not then look and look again at the spectacle of a bleeding Saviour? Shall we not behold our dying Lord, and learn what our sins have done? Shall we not go and stand by his cross, and see the Prince of life first torn with the whip, the scourge, the thorns, the nails; and then pierced to the very heart with the spear? However else we may employ our eyes, we should above all fix them on the cross of Christ; for it was we who by our provocations had a share in the mournful catastrophe. It is there we read the record of our guilt written in his precious blood.

BUT WHAT IF ALL THIS WOE AND SUFFERING SHOULD BE FOR OUR SALVATION! Should not this lead us to regard the scene with still more intense earnestness? The very circumstances, indeed, of the crucifixion, the unspeakable dignity of the sufferer, the share we had in crucifying him, may well draw our eager eyes to the cross; but this, this adds the last touch to the

* See Bishop Andrews's Sermons, p. 333.

affecting picture, that the Saviour willingly endured all this for us—that the very scenes which, so far as we are concerned, were the effect of our crimes, were, by the mysterious counsel of God, the expiation of them. Yes, *he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we were healed. He bare our griefs and carried our sorrows.* The Cross beheld by faith is the great remedy of sin. “Christ was weary, that we might rest; he hungered that we might eat the bread, and thirsted that we might drink the water of life. He grieved that we might rejoice, and became miserable to make us happy. He was apprehended that we might escape; accused that we might be acquitted, and condemned that we might be absolved. He died that we might live, and was crucified by men, that we might be justified before God. In brief, *he was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*” 2 Cor. v. 21*.

Such is the looking unto Christ of which my text speaks. Need I stop to point out what a powerful means it must be of producing deep repentance? Need I ask whether the heart, already softened by *the Spirit of grace and sup-*

* Bishop Beveridge, ut supra, p. 6.

plications, will not be led by such believing views of a dying Saviour, to an entire renunciation of sin, to a holy grief for it, and a determined abandonment of it? The Cross, and the Cross alone, is the chief means of producing godly sorrow. But this will appear more clearly whilst I show,

III. THE EFFECTS OF THE SPIRIT OF GRACE
THUS LEADING THE SINNER TO LOOK BY FAITH TO
HIM WHOM HE HAS PIERCED.

The returning Jews, when they shall view by faith their crucified Messiah, will mourn for their national sins in piercing him, and for all their personal transgressions. Their hearts will be penetrated with sorrow and compunction. They will see that they crucified the Lord of glory, and wickedly slew the hope and honour of their nation, their promised King. This mourning will resemble the bitterness of a parent weeping over an only son, or the grief of the Jews in the town of Hadadrimmon over the pious prince Josiah * cut off by an untimely death. It will be a grief which will demand privacy and solitude, and divide every part of each family from the rest, for mourning and lamentation.

In that day shall there be a great mourn-

* See 2 Chron. xxxv. 24.

ing in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadad-rimmon in the valley of Megiddon. And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart and their wives apart, the family of the house of Nathan apart and their wives apart, the family of the house of Levi apart and their wives apart, the family of Shimei apart and their wives apart. All the families that remain, every family apart and their wives apart. Ver. 11—14.

Possibly every circumstance of this prediction may be fulfilled in the future conversion of the Jews. Certainly the spiritual import of it is accomplished in every true penitent. The effect produced by the influences of the Spirit, as a Spirit of grace and consolation, leading the awakened sinner to view the Saviour whom he has pierced, is a deep and holy lamentation for him *. This characteristic of repentance is

* The person is here changed from the first to the third. *They shall look unto ME whom they have pierced; they shall mourn for HIM.* In the former words Christ himself is the speaker, as I have already noticed. In the latter, by a change of persons common in the prophecies, the sacred writer speaks in the name of Christ, as other prophets are accustomed to do. A similar change of person is found in Isaiah, liii. 4: *Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise HIM, he hath put him to grief; when THOU shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed—by his knowledge shall MY righteous servant justify many.* So, again, in Micah, vii. 19;

put for all the other attendants and consequents of it; for this mourning for the Lord of life will be accompanied with a poignant grief for all our transgressions committed against God, with a holy separation from every sinful habit, and a renewal of the heart, temper, and conduct. But as this entire change will flow from the bitterness we feel for having pierced our divine Saviour, repentance is graphically described by this its first and chief evidence and effect.

THIS MOURNING FOR SIN will arise from that view of its malignity and hatefulness which the cross of Christ displays. The genuine sorrow of a penitent flows from the believing sight of a pierced Saviour. It is not so much the law as the Gospel which softens and wins the whole heart. The law convinces of sin, but the Cross teaches us to abhor it. The law instructs us in our duty, but it is mercy which wounds and affects the soul for the breach of it. The law shows us the sinfulness of sin, but the Gospel unfolds its ingratitude and baseness. We learn from the law the threatenings of God against transgression; but we discover in a crucified

HE will turn again—HE will have compassion on us—HE will subdue our iniquities; and THOU wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

Saviour the actual measure of the punishment we have deserved. The law instructs us in the holiness of God, but the Cross exhibits the most awful display of it. The law discovers our malady and leaves us under the power of it; the grace of salvation searches the disease still more deeply, and then brings the cure.

Yes, it is the sight of Christ dying for sin which makes us, not only mourn, but **BE IN BITTERNESS** on account of it. This mingles gall in every sinful pleasure; this saddens and confounds the guilty heart; this leads the penitent to *abhor himself and repent in dust and ashes*; this turns his inmost soul against all sin; this covers him with shame and confusion of face; this makes him feel that it is *an evil and a bitter thing to sin against God*; this causes him to *remember and be confounded and never open his mouth for shame, when God is pacified towards him for all the things which he has done*. These holy compunctions of soul are indeed far less powerful in the first period of a Christian's repentance: but all true penitence has something of this character; and in a further stage of his progress, when the sinner has been for some time under the teaching of *the Spirit of grace and supplications*, has again and again meditated on the Cross, has fixed his heart with intense interest on the Saviour there, has seen the share he had in his sufferings, and yet the pardon and

reconciliation which flow from them ; it is then that he indeed mourns for him, *and goes out, like Peter, and weeps bitterly.*

Then is his sorrow like that of A PARENT FOR A CHILD, OR OF A NATION FOR A WISE AND PIOUS PRINCE. Each of these images is striking. Who knows not the bitterness of a parent when his son, *his only son, his first-born*, has been suddenly snatched from his embrace? Who has not witnessed the anguish of the mother's heart, her disconsolate and penetrating grief which has refused to be comforted? Such was the grief of Jacob over the loss of Benjamin, and of David over the death of Absalom. What is there in all the compass of NATURAL SORROW more touching? And amidst public AFFLICTIONS, what can equal the general consternation, when a pious and wise prince has been carried off in the prime of youth by some unlooked-for and premature calamity? Yet is there no private or public affliction which can adequately represent the peculiar poignancy and bitterness of ingenuous repentance. The personal feelings mingle themselves with such as are social and national, when we contemplate the death of Christ. How can we endure ourselves, when we see what we have done to our Lord! Let faith place us near the Cross, and when we view our dying Redeemer, must we not feel our unworthiness and misery, in exposing a person so great, so holy,

so divine, so gracious, to agony and death? Can we ever forgive ourselves? Can we ever feel an indignation too intense against our crimes? Can we ever feel a zeal too vehement, or a revenge too determined, against those iniquities which have pierced the Prince of life? Can we conceive too vivid an impression of the guilt of sin which made such a sacrifice necessary? Can we be too much abased and confounded, when we consider our present ingratitude, coldness, and perverseness, after all the grace we have experienced? Can we be too indignant at ourselves for still harbouring and cherishing the traitors and enemies of Christ? Can we weep and lament too bitterly over those sins, or hate and detest them too deeply, which caused our Saviour to grieve, lament, and die?

And will not such a repentance COURT PRIVACY AND SOLITUDE? Yes, my brethren, if our sorrow can endure a witness, it is not profound enough. The presence even of the most beloved friend would be a painful interruption. We may sin in company, but we must repent alone. Peter denied his Lord with many around him, but *he went out* in order to weep bitterly. All deep emotions shun publicity. A man may act a part, and wish to be seen acting it; but when he repents, *he goes into his closet, and when he has shut his door, he prays to his*

Father in secret. The temper of the world is entirely opposed to that of spiritual mourning. The world calls for company and amusements : privacy suits the broken heart. There it can utter its sighs. There it can commune with its injured Lord. There it can learn its misery, its hope, its duty—*The land shall mourn, every family apart, and their wives apart.*

If these things then be so, if the Spirit of God is the author and source of true repentance, if a humble sight of the Cross is the chief means which he employs in producing it, and if the consequence of both is unaffected mourning for sin ; then let me observe,

I. TO THE SINCERE CHRISTIAN,
That he may learn the IMPORTANT PLACE WHICH TRUE PENITENCE OCCUPIES IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. It is not a duty which concerns him merely in his first turning to God, but one which requires his utmost vigilance through every step of his progress to heaven. As long as he is a sinner, he must mourn for sin. As long as he must owe his salvation to that mysterious cross on which his iniquities have nailed the Prince of peace, so long must he look to it with ingenuous and poignant grief. As long as he is adding to his former transgressions, fresh sins of infirmity, fresh marks of ingratitude, fresh omissions of duty, he must

renew his mournful confessions. As long as he is deriving from the 'pierced' Saviour additional and increasing supplies of consolation, pardon, and strength, he must look to him with deeper feelings of obligation and a more acute and penitential sorrow.

In this way will he further learn the CONNEXION OF REPENTANCE WITH THE HOPES AND PRIVILEGES OF THE GOSPEL. Repentance and grief for sin are perfectly consistent with a free remission, a gratuitous justification, and a simple and exclusive reliance on divine mercy. Nor are they less accordant with holy joy, peace, and triumph in the Saviour. In fact, they prepare for the one, they accompany and strengthen the other. Repentance, learnt at the cross of Christ, is that very lowly state of heart, which alone can welcome properly a free salvation; whilst every other disposition of mind will misunderstand, reject, or abuse it. Nor can any other grace prepare for solid and permanent joy in believing.

Need I say, then, how strictly the EXERCISE OF EVANGELICAL REPENTANCE IS CONNECTED WITH A HOLY AND CIRCUMSPECT CONDUCT? What, when it teaches us that every sin pierces the Saviour? when it embitters evil in the very source and spring of it, and shows it surrounded with its most hideous consequences; when it creates and cherishes a new and holy temper of

mind? No. I need not dwell on this point. We do not want the doctrine to be expounded; we need only the practice of it to be confirmed. We want only more copious supplies of *the Spirit of grace and supplications*, we require only more near and affecting views of the Cross; we need only deeper impressions of grief for those sins which crucified the holy and innocent Saviour; and then, whilst we see our misery and yet our remedy in the tragical scene, we shall have both the disposition and ability *to live, not unto ourselves, but unto Him that died for us and rose again.*

I only add here, that the DUTY OF FERVENT PRAYER TO GOD FOR THE CONVERSION OF THE JEWS, is obviously to be deduced from our subject. The prediction of the text in its most glorious import respects them, and should animate us, under every discouragement, to those persevering supplications, as well as those prudent and zealous efforts, which may, perhaps before we are aware, lead to their return to their Saviour and their God. The same *Spirit of grace and supplication* which we need for ourselves, is all that is necessary to subdue their unbelief, fix them in humble contemplation of their 'pierced' Lord, and bring them to mourning and bitterness of spirit for him.

But I cannot close the discourse without observing,

II. To THE UNGODLY AND IMPENITENT, that if any subject can show them their OBLIGATION to repent, and affect their hearts with a DESIRE to do so, it is the one we have been reviewing.

Consider YOUR OBLIGATIONS TO REPENT. Remember that it is your sins which have pierced the blessed Immanuel—those sins in which you are now living. Remember that till you repent and forsake them, you are crucifying the Son of God, as it were, afresh. Every act of luxury and impurity, of excess and debauchery, of pride and vanity, of fraud and covetousness, of hypocrisy and self-conceit, of formality and indifference, is a new insult to the crucified Saviour. And yet you are loving and delighting in these sins, which, if you were real Christians, you would mourn over and abhor. You have never prayed fervently to God for salvation. You have never seriously thought of the nature of repentance. You have never looked with one feeling of compunction to the Lord of life, whom you have nailed to the cross. You have never mourned for having brought him there. To other objects you have looked and looked again. For other calamities you have been in bitterness time after time. But to the bleeding Saviour you have never turned your eye. For the sufferings of Calvary you have never shed a tear. You call yourselves Christians, but what have you ever said or

done or felt as Christians? And yet God is long-suffering to you-ward. Yet he calls you to repentance. Consider, then, your obligations to this duty: or if you will not consent to this invitation, at least let me remind you that you MUST look upon Christ, either here in a way of penitence, or elsewhere in a way of despair; for, *Behold he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him, and all nations of the earth shall wail because of him.* Then, sinner, you will be forced to behold the Son of God, but not as a Saviour. Then you will look on him, but not with penitence. Then you will mourn for him, but not with salutary sorrow. No; *the heavens shall then depart as a scroll when it is rolled together, and every mountain and island shall remove out of its place: and the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bond-man, and every free man, shall hide themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and shall say to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb.* Rev. vi. 14—18.

Do you ask, then, what is your obligation to repent? Let these awful forebodings be the answer; or rather let the inexpressible tenderness and long-suffering of that crucified Saviour

who still waits to be gracious, form the reply. Let THIS KINDLE YOUR DESIRES TO TURN TO HIM. See, he stands with outstretched arms to save you. Hear his voice, complaining, as it were, from the cross, *Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold and see, if ever there was sorrow like unto my sorrow!* Look, then, sinner, to the Son of God whom you have crucified. Fall at his feet; acknowledge your transgressions; *Take with you words, and turn to the Lord;* beseech him to bestow on you *the Spirit of grace and supplications.* He has promised *to give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him.* This sacred Spirit can enable you to pray, can soften your heart, can discover to you the mysteries of the Cross, can grant you true repentance, and produce a genuine mourning for sin. Only implore his gracious aid. Do not harden your hearts. *Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.* Seize the opportunity. Begin this most necessary duty; and cease not your efforts till you have seen your sins and seen your Saviour, till you have repented, and believed the Gospel, till you have become a truly contrite and holy and obedient Christian.

SERMON V.

ETERNAL LIFE THE GIFT OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST.

1 JOHN, v. 11, 12.

And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life.

THE chief truths of religion are revealed so plainly in the Holy Scriptures, as to be intelligible to every serious inquirer. Whatever obscurity may rest on some parts of the sacred Volume, every thing is perspicuous in proportion as it is important. Thus the leading doctrines of the fall of man and his recovery in Christ Jesus, lie on the very surface of Holy Writ. God has been pleased to direct our regard to them with peculiar solemnity. The *Witnesses* of heaven and earth* attest by an express record the eternal life which is in the Son of God. To such a testimony who would refuse credence? To a

* 1 John, v. 7, 8.

truth delivered in a way so authoritative, who would not bend his utmost attention; especially, when the attestation relates to the greatest benefit which was ever bestowed on a lost world? God does not require us to believe so extraordinary a fact as that of his having *given to us eternal life* in his own Son, without an adequate record; and when he condescends to bear witness to such a fact, we may be assured it is one of unspeakable moment. Let us then consider with due anxiety,

I. The gift which is here said to be conferred;

II. The only means by which it can be obtained.

We notice,

I. THE GIFT WHICH IS SAID TO BE CONFERRED: *God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.*

The gift which God bestows is ETERNAL LIFE. This life, strictly speaking, is that glorious state of endless happiness which the *saints in light* enjoy before the throne of God; but it is frequently used in the Scripture to designate all those blessings which precede it and prepare the way for it; and is opposed to that everlasting death which our sins had merited. With this latitude it is to be taken in my text.

ETERNAL LIFE, THEN, CONSIDERED IN ITSELF,

is that state of consummate peace and holiness and joy which awaits the righteous in a future world. It is the unveiled presence of God. It is "the fruition of his glorious Godhead *." It is the *rest which remaineth* for his faithful people. It is the *inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, that fadeth not away*. It is the *fulness of joy which is in God's presence, and the pleasures which are at his right hand for evermore*. It is the blessedness which the sacred writers anticipate, when they speak of *beholding God's face in righteousness, awaking up after his likeness, and being satisfied with it; of being with Christ; and of falling down before the throne, and saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and blessing*. This will be life fitly so called; a life with no decay or impurity, no change or interruption, no satiety or weariness. It will be spiritual and perfect; immeasurable in its degree, eternal in its duration.

But, in addition to this, ALL THOSE BLESSINGS WHICH PREPARE the Christian for this unutterable felicity, are also included in the expression *Eternal Life*. *He that believeth on the Son of God HATH everlasting life*. He becomes entitled to it upon his pardon and justifi-

* Collect for the Epiphany.

cation before God, and his acceptance and adoption into the divine family. He is an *heir of God*. He has the *Spirit of holiness* communicated in regeneration, which is in him *a well of water springing up to everlasting life*. He has the pledges and anticipations of his full redemption in the seal and earnest of the Holy Ghost. The hope of eternal life is itself a prelude of heaven. Besides which, the happiness of communion with God, the enjoyment of his paternal love, the calm pleasure of holy meditation, and the visits and manifestations of his Saviour's mercy, are all evidences that the Christian has *eternal life abiding in him*. These are of themselves unspeakable blessings; blessings, indeed, such as, previously to the full display of them in the Gospel, *eye had not seen, nor ear heard, neither had entered into the heart of man*.

In order, however, to understand better these remarks, we must contrast this eternal life with THE EVERLASTING DEATH WHICH IT REMOVES. For we were *by nature children of wrath even as others*. We had incurred by our sins the righteous curse of God's holy law. We were *enemies in our mind by wicked works*. We were under condemnation. Banishment from the divine presence, the torments of a corroding conscience, misery unutterable of body and soul, the dreadful society of the devil and his angels, all the full inflictions of infinite wrath and infi-

nite justice, whatever the provoked majesty of God could demand, or the avenging power of God put into execution—all this we had incurred as transgressors against him. Estimate, then, the terror of this eternal death on the one hand, and the height of glory to which eternal life will raise us on the other, and you will be better able to appreciate the gift which we are now considering. Look down, if you can venture to do it, towards the impenetrable darkness of hell, and look up to the ravishing bliss of paradise; and when you have contrasted the two, say what must be that LIFE which delivers us from the one and bestows upon us the other.

But I proceed to notice, that God confers this blessing AS A GIFT—*God hath GIVEN to us eternal life.* This is a point which, we might think, could require little proof. For if we are all sinners against God, if we have forfeited his favour and lie under his curse, then how can salvation be obtained otherwise than as a gift? Where are the merits which are to purchase it? Where is the covenant of works which can convey it? Where the uninterrupted and perfect obedience which can fulfil the conditions prescribed for its attainment? Where the atonement to repair the injured justice of the Lawgiver? Where the superabundant duties to make up for previous defects? Where the present security of virtue to prevent additional

faults? Where even the disposition of heart to turn to God? Where the relenting spirit which weeps for sin? Where the human strength which can lead us on against it, or the human resolution which can subdue it? In a word, where is the man who, on any supposable terms, can claim this salvation as a reward? To every one of these, and a thousand similar questions, there is but one reply—Man is by nature *dead in trespasses and sins*, unable to save himself, if he were disposed, and indisposed, if he were able.

Eternal life, then, is undeserved, and is gratuitously bestowed. *By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. I give unto them eternal life. The gift of God is eternal life. Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life.* Every part of this unspeakable blessing, whether we regard the full fruition of it in heaven, or any of the preparatory steps to it, is spontaneously conferred, as by a sovereign who claims to himself the right of *doing what he will with his own*.

This will appear more evidently, if we consider THE PARTICULAR MANNER IN WHICH GOD GRANTS THIS INESTIMABLE GIFT.—*This life is in his Son.* God does not bestow it on man, as he did on Adam, but treasures it up for him in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This still more directly shows that the blessing is entirely free. *It*

hath pleased the Father that in Christ should all fulness dwell. The salvation of sinners is in him alone. This is the one method in which *it became Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, to bring many sons unto glory.* The expression of the text is very strong, **THIS LIFE IS IN HIS SON**; this eternal life, which is gratuitously conferred on us in the Gospel, is laid up, deposited, secured, hidden, sealed in Christ. He is the proprietor, the owner and dispenser, the treasurer and guardian, the spring and source of it. Life is in him as water is in the fountain, as riches are in the mine, as the pearl is in the casket, as the sap is in the tree, as light and heat are in the glorious orb of day.

Christ has **LIFE IN HIMSELF**, as the word *which was with God and was God; that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.* He has life, also, as **THE MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD AND MAN**; for *the life was manifested.* *As the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given also unto the Son to have life in himself.* God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. *He came that we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly.* We have already seen that our Lord and Saviour has purchased this life, and all that pertains to it, with his own blood; and that he bestows it on *whom-*

soever he will. But he is moreover the source of it in the hearts of Christians by the mysterious presence of his Spirit. *They are dead, and their life is hid with Christ in God. They live, yet not they, but Christ liveth in them; and the life which they live in the flesh, they live by the faith of the Son of God. He is the bread of life; and he that eateth, partaketh of, him, even he shall live by him. He is the resurrection and the life. He shall change our vile body, and make it like unto his glorious body; quickening our mortal bodies by his Spirit which dwelleth in us.* And at last, as the Judge of quick and dead, he shall invite us to partake of that eternal joy, which is the consummation of the life already begun in the soul, saying, *Come, ye blessed children of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*

Thus Christ is the sole fountain and source from which eternal life flows to sinners. Life is in him essentially, and in him efficiently. He bestows the life of acceptance, the life of holiness, and the life of glory. In him, as the living Head, all the body of the church *by joints and bonds having nourishment ministered and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.* He, and he only, is in possession of all that life which is the salvation of men. The Father is propitiated through his sacrifice, has exalted him

by his own right hand, and has given him the Spirit without measure, in order that he might bestow everlasting salvation on sinners, by raising them to spiritual life now by his grace, and to the full fruition of eternal life at the resurrection of the last day.

Such is emphatically the GIFT OF GOD. Such is the main blessing of the Gospel. Such is the free salvation which is in Christ Jesus. Let us then ask ourselves, before we proceed, whether we understand this fundamental truth, whether we receive it into our hearts, whether we believe most cordially, what we profess, that *eternal life is the gift of God*, and that it is in Christ Jesus, even in him only. If we perceive aright this commanding doctrine, we shall be prepared for seeing every thing else in religion in its true light. Without it, all will be darkness.

To confirm the view thus taken of the gift bestowed upon us in the Gospel, let us go on to consider,

II. THE ONLY MEANS BY WHICH THIS GIFT CAN BE OBTAINED:—*He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.*

We might have imagined that the former verse was sufficient to show the way of life in Christ Jesus; but this solemn and explicit de-

claration is added, in order to explain still further so important a doctrine. He, and he only, I repeat it, who *has the Son*—that is, by a lively and operative faith—*has life*; whilst all those who *have not the Son of God, have not life*; but, on the contrary, remain exposed to eternal death. This is a plain and most conclusive statement. Life or death depends on our *having the Son of God*.

What then is meant by this emphatic expression? Who can be said to HAVE THE SON? How can the incomprehensible Word, who was *in the beginning with God and was God*, be possessed and contained by *man that is a worm, and the son of man that is a worm*? What finite being can receive infinity? What created power endure the presence of omnipotence? What limited capacity compass and hold the immeasurable glories of the Godhead*? What human heart entertain the eternal, invisible Saviour? Yet, mysterious as it may appear, he, and he alone, who *hath the Son*, hath life; not, however, as to the incommunicable attributes of his Deity, but as to the gracious participation of his benefits. In the first sense, *the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain him*; in the second he dwells in the lowly heart of every true believer. As to his ineffable glory, he *upholds*

* Ephes. iii. 19.

all things by the word of his power; as to his inestimable love, he gives himself to every real penitent. With regard to his Deity, he is the invisible God, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; but, in reference to his grace and mediatorial offices, he is possessed and appropriated and retained by a living faith.

What then is FAITH? It is an implicit credit given to the divine testimony in the Holy Scriptures. Testimony is the appropriate object of faith, as light is of the eye. Invisible and distant blessings are thus brought near, and realized, and embodied. Now, as the whole doctrine of Jesus Christ, and the entire knowledge we have of eternal life, are derived from the revelation which God has given of them in his word, it must be by that word only that we can *have the Son*; for of that word it may be justly said, *This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.* Faith receives with simplicity this witness of the God that cannot lie. The penitent reads, under its influence, every part of the volume of inspiration, and credits all he reads, however new or mysterious or humiliating. Since, however, man is a fallen and ruined creature, and the leading truth of the Bible is the record concerning Christ, faith, when it is genuine, fixes most intensely on this doctrine. It consequently produces, in the first place, a humble application

for mercy, and a simple trust and reliance on the Saviour's merits; and then forms us to an union with him, and a hope in the future blessings he has promised. It thus becomes the *substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen*. Especially it *worketh by love, purifieth the heart, and overcometh the world*; and the fruits of holiness thus produced, distinguish it as a living and divine principle, from a notional, a speculative, an unproductive assent of the understanding only.

By this faith—which, far from being the meritorious cause of the blessings of salvation, is itself the gift of God—the true penitent receives Christ Jesus unto justification. Feeling his own guilt and condemnation as a sinner, he reads the exhortations to repentance. He discovers the way of salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. He ascertains that God has *given to men eternal life*; and that this blessing is treasured up in that Saviour who purchased it by his own obedience unto death, and is exalted to bestow it on all who humbly apply to him. He receives this testimony; he comes to God in the name of Christ; he prays for pardon and justification only through the merits and mediation of the Saviour; he renounces his own righteousness, and all reliance, whether in whole or in part, on the works of the law, and reposes all his trust in the *righteousness of God by faith*.

Thus he looks to Christ, as the Israelite to the brazen serpent, that he may live. He builds on him as the sure foundation. He is intimately united to him, as the graft is inserted into the stock. He flies to him, as the manslayer fled to the city of refuge. He enters into him, so to speak, as Noah entered into the ark. He receives him as a man receives a free and unspeakably valuable gift. He welcomes him as the patient welcomes his physician, or as the captive hails his deliverer. He has him as the host has and entertains the guest. He possesses him, as the merchant-man the pearl of great price. Yea, he has even a claim to him, as the heir is entitled to the inheritance.

The faith, which is thus *imputed* to us *for righteousness*, and is the means of our justification *without works*, receives every part of God's testimony concerning Christ. It welcomes him, therefore, in all his other offices, as well as in those more immediately connected with our pardon and justification. It receives him as the great prophet and teacher of the church; and it submits to his yoke and yields a cheerful obedience to his commandments, as the ruler and king of his church. Thus it unites the penitent to Him, as the members are united to the head. It enables him to live by Him, as a man is sustained by his appointed food. It brings him to do every thing in his name, regarding his will,

depending on his grace, and aiming at his glory. It leads him, in a word, to receive the Saviour for all the ends and purposes for which he is revealed in Holy Scripture *.

I ask, then, whether such a person may not be said to *have the Son*. Is not Christ his? Has he not an interest in his benefits, a share in his salvation? Does not Christ, as it were, make over himself and all his blessings to him? Does he not *come unto him and take up his abode with him*? Does he not *dwell in his heart by faith*? Is there not such an intimate, though mysterious, union between the Saviour and the believer, that he “spiritually eats the flesh of Christ and drinks his blood, is one with Christ and Christ with him †?” He *has the Son*. The eternal Son of God is possessed in the highest and most important sense, not by the heavens where he displays his glory, nor by the angels who worship before his face, nor by the devils who feel his power, nor by the creation which is supported by his providence, but by the lowly heart which bows to his grace and glories in his salvation.

And if the true believer thus has the Son, I farther ask, WHETHER HE HAS NOT LIFE? Is

* See on the important subject of faith, “Christian Essays, by the Rev. S. C. Wilks,”—a work of great merit and deserving an attentive perusal.

† Communion Service.

he not *justified freely by God's grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus*? Are not his sins cast, as it were, *into the depths of the sea*? Is he not *cleansed by the blood of Christ from all sin*? Is not the law of God satisfied, and the sentence of death reversed, and the gift of life bestowed? Does he not stand as righteous in God's sight? Is he not *accepted in the Beloved*? Is not the righteousness of God reckoned to him as his property, and put upon him as his vesture? And is not this acquittal, this justification, this deliverance, life in the highest and most obvious sense? Was he not dead in the eye of the law, waiting only the execution of the sentence; and is he not now alive by a free acquittal? Does he not stand reconciled, absolved, adopted, beloved? Yes, he has eternal life. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my words and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life.*

And has he not life also in the way of incipient glory and communion with his God? What is the true life of the rational creature, but the knowledge and love and service of God; and what then are righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, but the life of the soul? What is regeneration but the communication of a new life to the man before dead in trespasses

and sins? What are confession and self-abhorrence and hatred to sin; what are faith and love, holiness and communion with God; the duties of prayer, the emotions of gratitude, and the songs of praise, but the evidences of an awakened and quickened soul? And what is the source of all these but union with Christ?

And shall not these foretastes and earnest of heaven issue in that eternal life for which they prepare the Christian? For what is glory but grace consummated? What is everlasting life, but the perfection of spiritual life? What is the kingdom of God above, but the same kingdom which was begun here, completed at last in all its parts, pervading the whole man, heightened, refined, indissoluble, eternal?

He then that *hath the Son, hath life*. He who possesses the fountain, commands the streams. He who buys the field, gains the treasure. He who obtains the Son, has all the blessings which flow from the Son, even pardon and holiness here, and eternal life hereafter.

But to strengthen the impression of these statements, we must now proceed to consider the awful reverse—HE WHO HATH NOT THE SON OF GOD, HATH NOT LIFE. This is indeed implied in the direct affirmation of the preceding part of the sentence; but it is added here,

in a manner usual in the Holy Scriptures, in order the more explicitly to declare what are the only means of obtaining the gift of God in the Gospel. Until the Son be in some sense ours, our possession, our property; we have no share in his blessings, nor any title to his salvation. All who are in the city of refuge, derive from it the protection which it affords; but they who have not entered this city, remain exposed to the destruction which impended over them. God *has given to us eternal life*; but it has pleased him to constitute his Son the only medium of obtaining it. Those therefore who receive the testimony of God and *have the Son*, enjoy the proffered benefit; while those who have not the Son, have not the life which is laid up in him.

It is obvious, then, who are the persons that are here said *not to have the Son*. Assuredly it is not necessary to observe that the infidel who denies the truth of the Scripture generally, or who impugns particularly the several great doctrines revealed in it, *has not the Son*. Those who deny the mission, or the glory, or the atonement, or the intercession of the Son of God, can never possess the Saviour whom they condemn. But it is more generally important in a Christian country to remark that the vicious also and the profligate, who serve their own lusts, and live in the contempt of true godliness, who trample on the laws of God, and

riot in the gratification of sensual pleasure, *have not the Son*. Nor have those the Son, who live in a vain and giddy circle of folly and inconsistency, though free from gross immoralities. Nor has the grave and calculating worldling, whose God is his gain. Nor the proud and formal professor of Christianity, who, relying on his own works, and establishing a presumptuous claim to life, secretly disdains to be saved by grace as the free gift of God in Jesus Christ. Nor yet again has the speculative adherent to an orthodox creed, who, with loud claims to religion, disgraces by his spirit and conduct the doctrine he ought to adorn. All these, and an endless variety of similar characters, are included in this awful sentence; **THEY HAVE NOT THE SON**. They have not repented of their sins, have not returned to God, have not received his testimony, have not believed in Christ for everlasting life; have not obtained the gift of righteousness, have not partaken of the renewing grace of the Holy Ghost. Whatever else therefore they may have, *they have not the Son of God*. They may have worldly wisdom, learning, and philosophy; they may have well-defined notions of religion; they may have forms, and confidence; they may have a speculative and presumptuous faith; they may have credit with a party and in-

fluence over the minds of others: but nothing of this kind will avail them as to the salvation of their souls. Without a true living faith, there can be no interest in Christ. If, indeed, we were treating of subjects relating to this life, and the respect due to a merely reputable religion or a fair social conduct, such persons might have some claim to notice: but when we speak of pardon, holiness, and eternal life, nothing can be a substitute for *Having the Son*.

All such characters HAVE NOT LIFE; they are dead in sin and under condemnation. They are still under the curse of the law, still exposed to the eternal death they have merited, still without either a title or meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. *He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; but he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.* Nay, the very circumstance of having rejected the greatest gift of God, and despised his offers of mercy in his beloved Son, will fearfully aggravate, instead of lightening, their doom. *This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. He that believeth not, is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

Awake then, sinner, to a conviction of your awful condition. Receive with faith the testimony of God as to the only way of life, and as to the condemnation which will overtake those who have not the Son of God. Let no delusions of your own mind, or any fascinating errors of the world, persuade you that you can be safe in your present state. Observe, I entreat you, what was noticed at the beginning of this discourse, THE SOLEMN RECORD which God has delivered on this subject. He condescends to attest, to depose, to bear especial witness to this fundamental truth. All the doctrines of Scripture are, indeed, in a general sense a part of the record of God. They come with divine authority, and challenge our implicit belief: but the commanding truth of my text is ushered in with a solemnity which is designed to awaken our most intense regard. *There are three*, observes the sacred writer, *that bear record in heaven*—to this one leading truth, that eternal life is in the Son of God and in him only—the FATHER, by repeated declarations from heaven: *the WORD*, by his revelation of himself to the dying Stephen, to Saul on his way to Damascus, and to the beloved disciple in the isle of Patmos: *the HOLY GHOST*, by his descent like a dove on the incarnate Saviour*.

* I am well aware of the controversy on this text, and have attentively weighed, so far as I have been able, the

And there are three that bear witness in earth to the same truth: the Spirit, in the Holy Scriptures and in his gracious operations on the heart; the water of baptism appointed as one of the sacraments of the Christian dispensation; and the blood represented by the consecrated element of wine in the other. And to what do these witnesses bear record? What is it that is introduced with such circumstances of authority? What is it that all the testimonies of heaven and earth, all the declarations of the Almighty, at the first promulgation of the Gospel, and all its standing memorials in every subsequent age—what is it that they attest? What is the truth which is taken out, as it were, from the surrounding topics of divine revelation, and placed alone for our separate contemplation? It is this, THAT GOD HATH GIVEN TO US ETERNAL LIFE, AND THIS LIFE IS IN HIS SON; HE THAT HATH THE SON HATH LIFE, AND HE THAT HATH NOT THE SON OF GOD, HATH NOT LIFE.

Now, if *we receive the testimony of men*, and arguments on either side. I incline, however, to the opinion of Dr. Hey, the late Norrisian Professor, that the text is genuine; and, with this impression, do not scruple to adduce it in this place. I observe also, that the late Mr. Milner of Hull, a man of sound learning, and whose judgment was eminently discriminating, comes to the same conclusion. See Milner's Sermons, vol. ii. on 1 John, v. 14, 15.

all the most important transactions of life are suffered to depend on its accuracy, surely *the testimony of God is greater*—is more indisputably certain. Surely God knoweth all things, can neither mistake nor be imposed upon, is in himself essential truth, and will in no respect deceive his creatures. Shall we not then receive his record? Shall we not dismiss at once the vain phantasies of a corrupt imagination, and bow with reverence to this authoritative record of mercy?

And yet men are practically and in their hearts rejecting this testimony of God every day! They flatter themselves, after all, that there is life elsewhere than in Christ! They go on in folly and impenitence, and still hope to enter heaven. They trust in their own works and deservings, and disdain to receive the gift of free mercy. Satan persuades them, as he did our first parents, that they *shall not surely die*. They believe the current notions of the world around them; but they do not credit the truth of God himself. They form a false estimate of the nature of religion; and judge by far too favourably of themselves. In the meantime, they never humbly study the Scripture, nor implicitly receive its testimony, nor implore the teaching of the Holy Spirit. And thus, sinking from depth to depth in guilt, they come

at last to *mock God*, and *make him* A LIAR—a consideration startling in the extreme! A condition awful beyond conception! What! shall man dare to contradict his Maker, a servant his Lord, a sinner his Judge, a finite ignorant creature his infinitely wise Creator, a condemned and lost criminal his gracious Deliverer! What madness and what presumption is this! What ingratitude, as well as folly! *Shall not I visit for these things? saith the Lord; shall not my soul be avenged on such a transgressor as this?*

Repent then, sinner, of *this thy wickedness*, and *pray God*, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. Bow thy understanding to divine instruction. Receive the word which is sent to guide thee to heaven. Too long hast thou hesitated; too long hast thou listened to the sophisms of a vain and wicked world; too long hast thou lived without faith. Now attend to the solemn attestation of God. Embrace with avidity that infinitely important doctrine, which is the sum of the Bible—the doctrine of Christ crucified. Examine the momentous point, whether you have, or have not, the Son of God. Be assured there is no life but in him. Go, prostrate yourself at the feet of that Saviour whom you have so long despised; receive his words; welcome his atonement; implore his grace and Spirit; *lay hold of*

eternal life; venture on his promise. *So shalt thou find life, and obtain favour of the Lord.* Then shall the same testimony, which it was necessary to employ to convince you of your sins, become the source of your consolation and the foundation of your hope. The record of God, and that alone, will then sustain your trembling faith. The witnesses in heaven and in earth will then be necessary to save you from despair. The gift of eternal life will appear to you so astonishing, that you will only be encouraged to believe by considering the most solemn and repeated assurances, which God has vouchsafed to afford you. To credit the promise of eternal life in Christ Jesus, is indeed to a penitent, who sees something of the evil of sin and the corruption of his nature, an effort to be supported only by the irrefragable testimony of a divine witness. On no other testimony can the anxious penitent rely. But this witness shall never fail you. You shall find this testimony of God to be sure. You shall obtain pardon and righteousness through the infinite merits of Christ; you shall be brought to a life of faith, obedience, and communion by the indwelling of his Spirit; you shall have the foretaste of that eternal life which he has purchased for all believers, in the secret witness of your conscience, in the joys of faith, the anticipations of hope, and “the mysterious com-

merce of the Holy Spirit with your heart * :”
and you shall at length come to the full possession of eternal life itself, the gift of the same Saviour, who died for you that he might wash you from your sins in his blood, and prepare and fit you for his immediate presence and glory.

* Bishop Horsley.

SERMON VI.

THE GRACE OF GOD IN PARDONING SIN.

MICAHA, VII. 18—20.

Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.

THERE is scarcely any thing in religion more difficult than deeply to feel our sins and mourn for them, and yet to believe firmly in the readiness of God to forgive them. When the penitent discovers the number and aggravation of his offences, and remembers the authority and majesty of the God whom he has provoked, he is usually prone to yield to despondency, and to consider the pardon of them as impossible. To

oppose such gloomy suggestions, therefore, and to lead the broken in heart to behold the benignant face of their heavenly Father, is an important as well as pleasing duty. The words of my text are well calculated for this design. They close the prophecies of Micah, and seem intended to console those who were really pious among the Jews, under the chastisements to which the sins of the nation were exposing them, and to strengthen their faith in the divine promises of future deliverance and salvation. We may consider from the text,

I. The matchless extent of God's pardoning mercy ;

II. The consoling application of this mercy to the case of the penitent sinner ;

III. The confirmation of both these topics, to be derived from the covenant of mercy itself.

I. THE MATCHLESS EXTENT OF GOD'S PARDONING MERCY.—*Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. Ver. 18.*

The Prophet appears in these words to break out into an abrupt and impassioned admiration of God's mercy, as the cause of all his forbearance towards his rebellious people. Indeed, the uniform character of God in his dispensations

to his church in all ages, is that of a God who *pardoneth iniquity, transgression, and sin*. The eye of the penitent and humble sinner is to be directed, then, to this point. For before he can make any consolatory application of the promises of grace to his own case, he must view and admire the infinite benignity and love of God in general, his readiness to pardon, his delight in mercy. He must not imagine him to be a hard master, but a compassionate father, who hastens to welcome the returning prodigal, and to embrace him with the most condescending and exuberant affection.

This part of the character of God will appear as we review the several expressions in this portion of the text. **HE PARDONETH INIQUITY.** He is ever engaged in remitting the sins of those who plead his mercy in the *Son of his love*. This is his habitual and delightful employ. As soon as the awakened penitent feels and confesses and forsakes his iniquity, and approaches his offended God in the name of Jesus Christ, desiring to rely on his atonement and trust to his merits, his sins, however great or manifold, are pardoned. Guilt and the desert of punishment, which oppressed him with an insupportable load, are removed. He has *redemption through the blood of Christ, even the forgiveness of sins*.

This is further evident by the following

clause, AND PASSETH BY THE TRANSGRESSIONS OF THE REMNANT OF HIS HERITAGE. This is a form of speech taken from the conduct of one who voluntarily overlooks an offence or declines to exact the punishment due to it; and who therefore acts as if he did not see it. Thus our God and Saviour, when we come to him with a contrite heart, does not allow himself, as he justly might, to be hindered or stopped by our sins, but acts as one who sees them not. If he should indeed *enter into judgment with us, no man living could be justified*. If he should *mark what is done amiss, none could stand*. Our iniquities would immediately meet him, and present themselves before his eyes. But when God pardons sin, he passes, as it were, over it, even as a hastening traveller urges on his way and neglects the impediments in his road. Or, rather, like the commissioned angel, who, when he went out at midnight to slay the first-born of the Egyptians, *passed over* the houses where the blood of the expiatory lamb was sprinkled on the lintel and side-posts; the Almighty Avenger *passes by* the transgressions of those who are protected by the sacrifice of that *Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world*. When he sees that sacred blood sprinkled, as it were, on the abode, he desists from his vengeance, and forgets all his displeasure. He looks with infinite complacency on the humble suppliant,

and accounts him as one of *the remnant of his heritage*; of that heritage which is no longer confined to the children of Abraham according to the flesh, but which embraces all the spiritual and invisible body of Christ's church.

With regard to such, HE RETAINETH NOT HIS ANGER FOR EVER. We find that of old he often laid aside his wrath towards his people; and though perhaps he delivered them up for a time to their enemies, yet he forgot not his mercy, but restored them again to his favour and protection. So now also he *retains not his anger for ever* against the lowly penitent. He is indeed provoked with the obstinate and rebellious. Whilst men go on in their wickedness, he is *angry with them every day*; and if they persist in their crimes, *he will not spare them, but his anger and his jealousy shall smoke against them*. But when they truly repent and turn unto him, immediately he lets go all his wrath, he views them with infinite compassion, he pardons them, he passes by their sins, and accepts them *to the praise of the glory of his grace*. It is true they may not have the full and immediate enjoyment of these privileges; they may not discern his gracious smiles; he may delay the manifestation of his mercy, and seem to keep his anger for a time, in order to *humble them and to prove them*; yet he soon, as though repenting, comes

back to them most placidly, and testifies that he is reconciled to them.

The spring of all this grace and condescension is that HE DELIGHTETH IN MERCY. He does not pardon reluctantly, and pass by our sins with hesitation or backwardness, but with willing promptitude and satisfaction. He might indeed *swear in his wrath that we should not enter his rest*. He might crush us with his power, or terrify us into despair by his justice; but, lo, he brings salvation, he gives a Redeemer, he reveals a way of pardon, he lets go his anger, he bestows grace; because it is his nature to be good, because he delights in kindness and beneficence. There is a force in the original phrase, which deserves notice. The expression is literally, *because, AS FOR HIM, he delighteth in mercy*; or, *because he delighteth in mercy, EVEN HE*. This emphatic turn of the sentence marks more distinctly that it is the mind and inclination and pleasure and will and desire of God to be merciful. Remission of sins in the gift of Jesus Christ is what he delights in. His very nature prompts him to it. We need inquire no further: *he will have mercy because he will have mercy*. When he executes wrath on the impenitent, he is described as slow and reluctant—*coming out of his place, doing his work, his strange work, and bringing to pass his act, his strange act*. But mercy is

congenial and gratifying, so to speak, to the divine mind. *God is love. He rejoices over his church to do them good, and bestows on them grace assuredly, with his whole heart and with his whole soul. He swears by himself that he has no pleasure in the death of a sinner. He is good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon him. He will save the contrite, he will rejoice over him with joy, he will rest in his love, he will joy over him with singing.*

What can this and similar language mean, but to exhibit to the sinner the matchless character of God? Why then should the inquiring and self-condemned penitent despair of pardon? Why should he allow Satan to obscure this astonishing truth of the divine mercy, and form before his eyes a different image of it? Why should he suffer him so to terrify him with his sins and so to place eternal death before his eyes, as to hide this benignant face of his heavenly Father, and to substitute for it a countenance of unmingled justice and wrath? Why should he let him tempt him to fly from God as an enemy, and to rush into despair? It is difficult indeed to conceive of the pardoning mercy of God, when we have learnt something of our real unworthiness and guilt; but it is not impossible. Has not God *so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son* for the redemption of

it? Is it not his glory to forgive? Does he not delight in mercy? Did he not proclaim his name to Moses, as *the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth?* Has not the mysterious sacrifice of the Cross made the exercise of this mercy consistent with all the demands of justice and holiness? Does not God repeatedly set forth his love and compassion on purpose to appease the agitations of the lowly heart? Then why not admit, acknowledge, believe, realize, adore the pardoning mercy of God? Why not admire the incomparable glory of the divine grace in forgiving sin? Why not exclaim with the Prophet in mingled surprise and gratitude, *Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, because thou delightest in mercy?* The difficulties in the way of remission may be great, and to us may appear insurmountable, but the glory of God in bestowing it is therefore so much the more illustrious. *He is, in this as well as every other respect, God, and there is none else; he is God, and there is none like him. Who is like unto the Lord our God, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? Who in the heavens can be compared unto the Lord, who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the Lord?* The first step to true consolation is, not to lessen our view of sin, but to enlarge our conceptions of the divine

mercy. We should consider him to be exalted in this attribute, as in every other, far above all human ideas of what might comport with the character of the Deity. We think not aright of God till we see him to be singular, excellent, with a distinct and separate honour above all things in the world. We may well stand amazed at the triumphs of grace in the salvation which is in Christ Jesus. Truly it is without compare—It *reacheth even unto the heavens*. All the displays of the divine perfections with which we are acquainted, are as nothing to the glory of pardoning sin, of giving a Saviour, of justifying the ungodly. Yet while this majestic truth excites your admiration, let it not overwhelm your faith; let it not appear incredible merely because it is stupendous and unparalleled. Rather apply it practically to your own case, and let it compose your anxious mind. You conceive perhaps that there is none like yourself in unworthiness and misery; remember then that there is none like unto God in pardoning; let this lead you to a humble hope of acceptance; let it be a light to cheer the path of penitence; let this correct the impressions of unbelief, and silence the forebodings of fear; let this fill and surprise and elevate and console your drooping heart; let it raise you to the expectation that you also may at length experience to your own indivi-

dual relief, this unspeakable goodness of your heavenly Father.

This brings me to point out,

II. THE CONSOLING APPLICATION OF THIS MERCY TO THE CASE OF THE PENITENT SINNER.—
He will turn again, he will have compassion on us; he will subdue our iniquities, and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

The Prophet, in this second verse of the text, appears to apply the general truth of the divine mercy, as stated in the former verse, to the particular circumstances of the Jewish church. He had previously spoken of God in the character which he had revealed of himself, and which had also been abundantly confirmed in his constant dealings with his chosen people. He now infers from this general review that God would again turn to them in his mercy under the particular afflictions which they were actually suffering, and would deliver them from their enemies both temporal and spiritual, and subdue and pardon their numerous sins. In the former sentence, the language was general, and expressed a grateful astonishment at the infinite love of God in the forgiveness of sin; but in this it is specific and appropriate—*He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us.* It would be of little moment to have some surprising ideas of the clemency of God, unless this

application of it to the actual circumstances of the church were added, and unless the faithful were assured for themselves that God would be merciful to THEM when they call upon him. And this is indeed the true reasoning of humble piety in every age. The penitent must first be persuaded that God is easy to be entreated and propense to mercy, and then must learn to accommodate this encouraging truth to his own special case.

Let then the awakened inquirer be assured from the declarations of the text, that God WILL TURN AGAIN. Though he has withdrawn from us on account of our sins, and left us in righteous indignation, yet he will return and bless us with his salvation; like a tender father, who goes away for a moment, and seems resolved to reject his offending child; and then, repenting as it were of his resolution, turns again to it and consoles it.

And how will he return? With what disposition of mind? HE WILL HAVE COMPASSION UPON US. All the misery and distress which we endure will be observed by him. Our sorrow for sin, our terror of conscience, our perplexity under the bondage of the covenant of works, our earnest prayers, our efforts to renounce every evil way, our sighs under a conviction of unworthiness, our inability to overcome as we could wish our corrupt affections, our anguish

at the apprehensions of his anger, our dread of eternal punishment—all our state will touch his heart and move his pity. A claim to merit we cannot advance, but an appeal to the compassion of God in Christ will never fail.

And what will be the effect of this compassion? HE WILL SUBDUE OUR INIQUITIES, that is, God will bestow the very blessing we need, and which we most ardently desire. This expression might perhaps, without violence to its meaning, be understood of the gift of forgiveness; but the more obvious and natural interpretation appears to be, that God would by his grace overcome the power and dominion of iniquity in the heart, and enable the penitent to love and obey him. Holiness is as necessary as remission. *Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?* To subdue, therefore, the tyranny of our sins, is one blessing which flows from the compassion of God. He enables us to trample upon these haughty foes, to take from them their might and dominion, and to gain the victory over them. Their power, indeed, is great; they fight against us, they lead us captive, they deliver us over as slaves and bondmen; so that the grace and power of God alone can effectually assist us in the conflict: but through that grace and power they may, they shall be subdued. *Sin shall not have*

dominion over us. The God of peace will bruise Satan under our feet. The humble penitent, who comes back to God, and strives with every effort to resist and overcome his passions, shall at length be enabled to prevail; he shall be *strengthened with all might by God's Spirit in the inner man*, and shall be effectually assisted to lead a holy and consistent life in all God's commandments.

But what shall become of his past iniquities and his present imperfections? May they not even yet rise up once more in judgment against him? To allay this natural fear, it is added that **GOD WILL CAST ALL OUR SINS INTO THE DEPTHS OF THE SEA.** His forgiveness shall be signal and complete. It shall be as if the whole mass of our guilt were buried in the mighty waters. A more striking description of the pardon of sin can scarcely be found in the Holy Scriptures. Other strong expressions are employed elsewhere to describe this blessing. Thus for example it is expressed by our iniquities *not being mentioned*; by their *being remembered no more*; by their *being blotted out as a cloud*; by their *being sought for, and there being none*; by their *being finished and made an end of*; by their *being cast behind God's back*; and by their *being removed from us as far as the east is from the west.* But all these images appear to yield in sublimity and force to the one we are

now considering. What is cast into the depths of the fathomless ocean sinks never to rise again. The image conveys to the mind the most lively impression of the completeness and efficacy and irrevocable nature of God's forgiveness; for the Prophet does not speak of some sins only, but of all, *Thou wilt cast ALL their sins*; nor does he describe them as cast on the sea-shore merely, from whence they might possibly be thrown up and again appear, but as sunk in the very midst of the vast ocean, never again to come to light. There may possibly be an allusion here to the overthrow of Pharaoh and his hosts, when pursuing Israel. *Pharaoh's chariots and his hosts hath he cast into the sea*, said Moses on that memorable occasion; *his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red Sea; the depths covered them, they sank into the bottom as a stone. The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil: thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters.* In like manner, when all our spiritual foes rise up, as it were, to pursue us, when guilt and terror and despair surround us, when the wrath of God seems just overtaking us, and Satan is ready to seize us as his captives; when all seems lost, and, self-condemned and with no apparent way of escape, we can scarcely utter even a short impassioned prayer—at this gloomy moment

divine grace hastens forward—a free pardon rescues the sinner; Satan and all his forces are stopped at the very instant of victory; their legions roll back with dismay; the deep swells around them; it repels, it covers, it overwhelms them; and the ransomed fugitive celebrates on the shore the glory of his deliverer.

Such is a faint picture of the blessing of forgiveness. In this way the general character of the divine mercy is actually brought home to the individual comfort of the true penitent, and affords him the relief he so much requires.

But this is not all: for I am now to show,

III. THE CONFIRMATION BOTH OF THE EXTENT OF GOD'S PARDONING MERCY AND OF THE CONSOLING APPLICATION OF IT, WHICH IS TO BE DERIVED FROM THE COVENANT OF MERCY ITSELF: *Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.*

The Prophet, after endeavouring to raise the faith of the pious Jews by a general celebration of the merciful character of God, and encouraging them to apply this to their own particular case, proceeds to direct their view to that covenant which had graciously been made with their fathers, and which assured them of the future coming of the Messiah, and of all the spiritual benefits which should attend it. They were not

to infer what were the nature and designs of God from their own reasonings, but they were to repose their faith on his revealed word. He had chosen Abraham, and had made a covenant with him and with his seed. A glorious Saviour was to descend from his race, *in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed*. In this covenant, pardon, grace, strength, consolation were assured to all *God's heritage*. In reference to it the ceremonial and typical observances of the law were enjoined; and in virtue of it they were accepted. This solemn engagement having therefore been made with *their fathers from the days of old*, the pious and humble Jews at the time when the Prophet wrote, might be confirmed in the hope which the general character of God had led them to form, of deliverance and salvation. It was in pursuance of this covenant that both national mercies, and individual pardon and grace, had been conferred. To it, therefore, they were to adhere in the darkest times, being well persuaded that, however discouraging the actual circumstances of the nation might be, God would perform all the promises which he had thus made and ratified.

A distinction may be observed between the words *mercy* and *truth*, as they are applied to this covenant. God is said to perform his TRUTH to *Jacob*, and his MERCY to *Abraham*; possibly because his covenant, as it was given

to Abraham, was an act of mere *mercy*; for God called him out of Ur of the Chaldees from among his idolatrous country and kindred; whilst it involved the divine *truth* to Jacob, because, in ratifying it to him, God only made good what he had before promised to his forefather Abraham. Thus mercy first bestowed, and truth afterwards confirmed, the covenant. In like manner, in every age, the act of grace by which God adopts us into his family, is founded on mercy and truth. He first offers himself freely to us, and then is faithful and true to his promises.

The humble penitent, therefore, who has been taught to admire the character of God as delighting in forgiveness, and who has endeavoured to apply the consideration of it to his individual consolation, may hope that God will perform to him also all the promises of that evangelical covenant, which is now dispensed with such superior light and grace in the days of the Gospel. The same stipulation of mercy which was made to Abraham and to Jacob, and to fulfil which the Messiah became incarnate, is still the source of peace and joy to every true believer. *They that be of faith, whether Jews or Gentiles, are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.* By the advent of Christ, God *performed the mercy promised to the fathers, and remembered his holy covenant.* The

very same word and oath of God, by which it was confirmed to Abraham, are still *the two immutable things which afford strong consolation to those who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them* *. To us, therefore, is the prophetic invitation of the Messiah addressed, in a more ample sense than to the Jews; *Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.* To us is the same consolation permitted in the darkest hour as to the royal Prophet, when he said, *Though my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; for this is all my salvation and all my desire.* To us also belong in the fullest sense its unparalleled blessings; *I will put my laws into their minds and write them in their hearts, and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people; for I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.* Yes; an union with God in the most endearing relation, and a corresponding supply of grace mercy and peace from his fulness in Christ Jesus; both founded on free forgiveness, and ending in everlasting life, are the unspeakable blessings to which we may

* See Heb. vi. 13—18.

aspire. These are spiritually the same as those contained in that promise (partly temporal and partly spiritual) which *God swore to our father Abraham, that he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear in righteousness and holiness before him all the days of our life.* And in consequence the penitent may be humbly confident that *the God of peace, who brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, will make him perfect in every good work to do his will, working in him that which is well pleasing in his sight.* But I forbear; for who can describe aright all the *mercy and truth* which flow to the obedient servant of God from the condescending terms of the covenant of grace? Let me rather, in concluding the review of this inexhaustible subject,

ENCOURAGE THE TREMBLING PENITENT TO ACT ON THE VIEWS WHICH IT UNFOLDS. Many are the fears and misgivings of the heart which is pierced with an acute sense of its sins, and has not yet apprehended the full mercy of the Gospel. It is difficult to treat such a case with sufficient tenderness. I am aware of the unnumbered sources of uneasiness and hesitation

* See Heb. vi. 13—18.

which are opened by an accusing conscience. The terrors of God's holy law penetrate the soul. The view of the Cross is at best obscure and distant. Death and eternity impend. Present imperfections aggravate the malady. In such circumstances, to conceive of the real glory of God in forgiving sin, and to rise to the hope of the Gospel, is a mighty task. It demands an effort to which a weak faith is unequal. Let then the agitated soul proceed step by step in advancing towards this high and indispensable attainment.

I do not ask you then to rejoice in believing. I do not ask you to ascertain your interest in the *Everlasting Covenant*. I do not require you in the first instance even to apply to yourself the encouragements which have been offered under the second head of the discourse. I simply call on you to VIEW THE PARDONING MERCY OF GOD GENERALLY, as it is exhibited in the Scriptures, and as it has been displayed in his dispensations towards his church in every age. Let your own case be now supposed to be out of the question. Believe only that God *pardoneth iniquity, that he passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage, that he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy*. Stop for a season at this point, and fill your mind with the astonishing theme. Do not hurry from the contemplation. Imbibe the reviving

truth. Implore the Holy Spirit to impress it upon your heart. Let this pervade your whole soul, that *there is forgiveness with God that he may be feared*—not, that you are forgiven—that is a distinct question—but that there is such forgiveness revealed in the cross of Jesus Christ, that all are invited to partake of the blessing, and that God *delighteth in mercy*.

Proceed in the next place a single step further. Allow that POSSIBLY YOUR SINS MAY BE PARDONED, AND YOUR CASE RELIEVED. I ask only this. Admit that PERHAPS it may please God to *turn and have compassion on you*. This consideration will greatly support your alarmed and distracted heart. Say only with the Prophet Joel, *Who knoweth if God will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him?* Or with the penitent Ninevites, *Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?* In each of these instances the very possibility of deliverance excited some measure of hope. Be encouraged in the same manner. Let these reflections support your mind. Rest in them till faith is strengthened for a further effort. Cast yourself with this probability, with this incipient hope, at the feet of the Saviour. Say with Jacob in another case, *Peradventure he will accept me*; or with Esther, *If I perish, I perish*.

But why should the humble penitent hesi-

tate to go still further? WHY SHOULD HE NOT CHERISH A FULLY ASSURED HOPE OF BEING PARDONED AND ACCEPTED? What! has God so *loved the world as to give his own Son* to die for sinners, and will he spurn you from his feet? What! does he *delight generally in mercy*, and will he reject you? What! has he unfolded a marvellous scheme of redemption, issued unlimited offers of pardon, invited all to repent and turn to him, and will he not welcome you when you pant for his salvation? Surely such suspicions are dishonourable to the divine character, and are the effect of unbelief and temptation. Surely they can be calculated only to drive you to utter despair. Surely they come from the Tempter, who was a *murderer from the beginning*. Surely there never was a single instance of the God of mercy refusing to hear and answer prayer. Dismiss then such dejecting thoughts! Arise, penitent, and let me lead you to the footstool of salvation. Lift up your drooping head. See your heavenly Father looks upon you in love. His face is all benignity and grace. Confess before him your sins, plead his invitation, cast yourself on his mercy. Hark! he says, *Thy sins are forgiven thee*; he bids thee *go in peace*; he assures thee that he is reconciled, he embraces and accepts and consoles thee! Believe the stupendous blessing. It may seem too great for you to receive, but it is not too great

for God to bestow. His mercy is his glory. He is beyond compare in his forgiveness, as in all his other benefits. Celebrate then his praises; adore his matchless grace; exclaim in admiring gratitude, *Lord, who is like unto thee, which deliverest the poor from him that is too strong for him; yea the poor and needy from him that spoileth him? Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity—because he delighteth in mercy?* The very sense you entertain of the value and necessity of the blessing; the holy wonder itself at pardoning mercy which fills your heart, is some evidence of your interest in it. Soon shall your faith be more confirmed. Soon shall you see that God has indeed *had compassion on you*. Soon shall you experience in your growing sanctification that he has *subdued your iniquities*; soon believe with joy that he has *cast all your sins into the depths of the sea*. Nor shall you be long ere you can contemplate as yours *all the truth and mercy promised to the fathers from the days of old*; and feel your interest in the covenant of grace with all its benefits and blessings. In the mean time, adore your Saviour; wait his pleasure; celebrate his praise; live to his glory; and commend to others his mercy. Honour him by a holy and humble life and temper; and exercise towards the miserable around you the forbearance you have

found yourself. *Be ye merciful, as your Father in heaven is merciful.* Thus living in his faith and fear and love, you shall enjoy his presence and favour upon earth, and at length shall behold his unveiled glory in heaven, and celebrate his mercy and compassion towards the *remnant of his heritage* in his immediate presence for evermore.

SERMON VII.

THE EFFECTS OF OUR LORD'S PASSION.

ISAIAH, LIII. 11.

He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.

THERE is no subject so stupendous, and yet so consolatory, as the death and passion of our divine Lord. It is the leading fact of Christianity; and the doctrine connected with it is the joy of every true penitent. References to it perpetually occur, whatever topic of faith or practice we may discuss. But it is necessary frequently to contemplate the sufferings of Christ as a distinct question, and to consider in one view the surprising effects which they are calculated to produce. This is the subject presented to us in those words of the Prophet, in which God the Father is represented as engaging to the Messiah, that, *When his soul should be made an offering for sin, he should see his seed, he should prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hand;*

and then, in my text, that he should *see of the travail of his soul, and should be satisfied.*

The subject, therefore, presented for our consideration is, the Passion of Christ; in meditating upon which, let us notice both The sufferings of our Lord; and The satisfaction which he feels at viewing the effect of them.

We consider,

I. THE SUFFERINGS OF OUR LORD.

The passion of Christ comprehends all that he endured upon earth, and particularly in the last scenes of his public ministry. It includes the sufferings of his body and of his mind. But the Scriptures sometimes speak more directly of the agony of his soul. This is the case in my text. Whatever were the pains which our Lord bore in his body, they were only faint pictures of those of his mind. The outward part indeed of his afflictions is most apparent, and might seem to be the most affecting; but it is the inward part which was really the most severe and unutterable. All trouble that presses on the mind is of itself by far more overwhelming than any thing which regards the body. *The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?* To the sufferings of the Redeemer's soul let us then especially attend.

These sufferings were CONTINUAL. His pas-

sion was not a severe, but momentary, conflict, with no considerable previous sorrow or difficulty. It was a mighty struggle at the close of a whole life of woe. From the manger to the cross our Lord *was acquainted with grief*. He *endured the contradiction of sinners against himself*. His ministry was rejected, his person was despised, his miracles were ascribed to the influence of Satan, his doctrine was perverted and his Father blasphemed. Often he was *grieved because of the hardness of the people's heart*. He wept at the approaching destruction of Jerusalem; and even his own disciples were not unfrequently, from their slowness of heart, an occasion of sorrow. Now, if the soul of righteous Lot was *vexed at seeing and hearing the conversation of the wicked*; and if the royal Prophet exclaimed, *O that I had wings like a dove, for then would I flee away and be at rest!* what must the perfectly holy Jesus have felt through the course of his ministry! For grief like this, perpetually recurring, even though it should not be in itself severe, is yet by its continuance unspeakably painful. To judge, then, of the extent of our Saviour's sufferings, we must remember that they were constant and uninterrupted.

But they were also EXTREME. No mind can conceive, no tongue express, what that meek and holy Redeemer suffered; especially in his

last bitter passion. *His soul was made an offering for sin.* “Infinite justice passed sentence, and infinite power put it in execution*.” He was poured out like water, and all his bones were out of joint, his soul also in the midst of his body was even like melting wax. Then was the prophetic prediction fulfilled, *Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts.* O direful moment! O unspeakable anguish! See the Son of the Most High prostrate in the garden of Gethsemane! *His soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death.* Thrice he entreats his Father, *if it be possible, that the cup may pass from him.* He is sore amazed. *His soul is troubled.* He is in an agony. *His sweat is, as it were, great drops of blood falling on the ground.* An angel descends to strengthen him. O extremity of woe! Is this the holy Saviour; this the Lord of glory; this the incarnate Deity?

But follow the sacred victim. From the garden he is led to be betrayed, buffeted, mocked, spit upon, blindfolded, dragged from one judgment-seat to another, devoted by the multitude to crucifixion. The sentence of death is extorted. He is condemned. Behold him as he stoops under the burden of the cross

* Dr. South.

which he is compelled to carry. And now he arrives at Calvary. His hands and feet are nailed to the accursed tree; his head is crowned with thorns. In this pitiable state behold the King of heaven and earth! In speechless agony he hangs upon the cross. At last even his heavenly Father withdraws from him, and forsakes him. The darkness which surrounded the cross was but an emblem of the sufferer's soul. Who can speak the mysteries of the scene? All the other sorrows of his passion are not to be compared with the dereliction which he now endured. How bitter the pang of separation from God is, can be best told by those who most ardently love him. *His presence is life.* It has made apostles sing praises in prison, and martyrs triumph at the stake. What then must the Son of God have now felt, whose love to his Father was perfect, and whose union with him was inexpressibly intimate! Of no other part of his passion did the Saviour utter a complaint; not of his sufferings in the garden, or at the bar of Pilate, or when nailed to the cross; not under the insults of the Jews; not of the thorns, the nails, the vinegar, the gall; not of the flight of his disciples. But when his heavenly Father withdrew the communications of his presence, he exclaimed in the depth of his anguish, *Eli, Eli, lama sabacthani, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* Then

was the *travail of his soul*. Then did he endure the wrath of God, the curse of the law, the temptations of the powers of darkness, all the woe arising from a full view of the evil of sin, and of the accumulated guilt for which he was about to atone. Well may the Greek church have adopted the remarkable language which occurs in her Litany, "BY THINE UNKNOWN AGONIES." Yes, what we know of these agonies is little, is but a faint image of the incomprehensible and unutterable reality of the sufferings which he endured. We are able only to say that he sustained all that pain of which his perfect human nature was capable; all the anguish inflicted by the anger of God, the penalty of sin, the terrors of judgment, the assaults of the devil. And if in this world a single drop of divine wrath falling into the conscience of a sinner, has at times quenched every hope, and involved him in inconceivable misery, darkness, horror, and despair; who shall measure the depth of that agony when all the vials of eternal wrath were poured out even to the dregs on the head of the Redeemer?

But in the next place the sufferings of our Lord were altogether VOLUNTARY. This circumstance adds an infinite dignity to his passion, that it was the fruit of spontaneous love. He *loved us, and gave himself for us*. No man took his life from him, but he laid it down of him-

self. In the midst of his anguish he could have *prayed the Father, and he would have sent him more than ten legions of angels.* And yet he *hastened to the garden; he was straitened till he had finished his work; he spake frequently during his ministry of the decease he should accomplish at Jerusalem; he said to Peter, who would have dissuaded him from suffering, Get thee behind me, Satan; for thou art an offence unto me.* It was this spontaneous mercy of our divine Lord, which increased the value of all he endured. If he had suffered merely in the ordinary manner of a martyr, the case would have been totally different. But he freely undertook the painful task. He exhibited throughout his passion that cheerful faith, submission, zeal, meekness, and charity, which marked the voluntary sufferer, and for which *the eternal Spirit* strengthened him. This sheds a lustre round the infamy of the Cross, and constitutes it, not merely an example of the purest holiness, but a sacrifice of the highest virtue. The moment we recollect the spontaneous nature of our Lord's humiliation and death, the glory of the passion begins to appear. The external ignominy is merged and lost in the beneficent and sublime motive; or rather serves to illustrate and commend the love of Christ in so freely and graciously sustaining it.

But the sufferings of Christ were EXPIA-

TORY. This, this is the key to all the preceding remarks. Whence the continual woe of the holiest person that ever trod this earth? Whence the extremity of his anguish? Whence the voluntary susception of the death of the cross? To atone for us. *His soul was made an offering for sin. All we like sheep had gone astray, and the Lord laid upon him the iniquity of us all. He, who knew no sin, was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. He died, the just for the unjust. He bore our sins in his own body on the tree. Christ was our surety, he stood in our place, he endured the punishment we had deserved, he satisfied the law of a holy God by fulfilling its demands and suffering its penalty, he exhibited to men and angels the awful consequences of sin, and vindicated and illustrated the honour of God's moral government. He was made a curse for us. Now God can exercise mercy and truth in entire harmony; can be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. The Saviour has thus finished transgression, made an end of sin, made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in everlasting righteousness.*

I add only further, that the sufferings of our Lord were COMPLETELY EFFECTUAL for the end for which he sustained them. *By ONE offering he perfected for ever them that are sanctified.*

*Christ was ONCE offered to bear the sins of many. He entered in ONCE into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. We want no other atonement. We want no relics of saints, no merits of the church, no sacrifice of the mass, no intercession of the Virgin Mary, no pilgrimages nor macerations, no indulgences nor vows. We believe that our Lord has "made by his one oblation of himself once offered, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world *."* He expired not till he had said, *It is finished.* O mysterious words! O accents of consolation and bliss! The wants of man are supplied, the work of God is accomplished; the redemption is finished; God is reconciled, pardon obtained, life purchased, the Church saved.

It remains only that we fix our eyes on this scene, that we meditate on the suffering Saviour, and repose our faith in him for pardon and eternal life.

This leads me to consider,

II. THE SATISFACTION WHICH OUR SAVIOUR FEELS IN VIEWING THE EFFECTS OF HIS SUFFERINGS.

The language of the text is remarkable:

* Communion Service.

He, the Messiah, shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied. An abundant reward shall be conferred on him. He shall see with infinite delight the effect and fruit of his sufferings and death. He is represented as eagerly looking for the promised benefits of his passion; and he shall not be disappointed. A glorious inheritance from among sinners shall be given him. Multitudes shall be justified and saved by his grace, and *the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.* These converts shall be, so to speak, the very *travail of his soul.* So immediately shall their pardon flow from his death, that he shall see in it the direct effect of his sacrifice, the labour of his sufferings, his very passion itself. Let us then consider the SIGHT and the SATISFACTION referred to in this part of my text.

With regard to the first, our Lord HAS SEEN *of the travail of his soul.*

From the beginning he BEHELD IN CONTEMPLATION all the fruits of his sufferings; this was *the joy which was set before him.* He viewed from far the effects of his incarnation. He saw God glorified, the law magnified, sin condemned, sinners rescued, hell confounded—*A thousand years are with the Lord as one day.*

During THE VARIOUS DISPENSATIONS PRECEDING HIS ACTUAL COMING IN THE FLESH, he saw the effects of the sacrifice which he had en-

gaged to make. From the fall of Adam to the very hour when our Lord endured the agony of the cross, every faithful servant of God was saved by the virtue of the destined redemption. Christ was *the lamb slain from the foundation of the world*. Abel was saved by faith in his future atonement. Enoch and Noah were rescued by the same redemption. Abraham *rejoiced to see the Saviour's day*. The typical economy of Moses was *the shadow and pattern of heavenly things*. David triumphed in his future seed. Isaiah *saw his glory*. All the patriarchs and prophets, and saints of God, from the primeval promise to the crucifixion, were first-fruits of our Lord's death; the anticipation of the future glorious trophies of the Captain of our salvation.

But it was ON THE CROSS ITSELF that the Lord Christ saw with one unerring view the full and splendid results of his undertaking. The text may perhaps be more expressly intended to convey this idea. *He shall see of the travail of his soul*; he shall, when in the midst of that agony which is to purchase a lost world, see in prospect the glorious victories of his grace, the triumphs of his Gospel, the salvation of sinners. Yes, in the depth of his grief and woe, amidst the ignominy of his death, the pressure of the divine wrath on his soul, the exultation of the priests, and the efforts of the powers of

darkness, he beheld the train of humble converts whom his sufferings should deliver and save; and animated by the view, he *fainted not nor was discouraged* during the dreadful conflict.

After his ASCENSION INTO HEAVEN, however, the prospect of the salvation of men began to be realized in a more ample manner. Then the Spirit was poured out, thousands were converted, the Gospel was preached throughout the world, churches were established, and multitudes of every nation were *added to the Lord*.

Throughout the SUCCEEDING AGES OF THE CHURCH the Saviour has still continued to behold the fruits of his travail. Wherever the Gospel has been carried or revived, wherever sinners have received its message, wherever pardon has been granted or holiness produced, wherever even one penitent believer has reached the glories of heaven, the eternal Lord of the church has marked the event. Nothing has escaped the diligent eye of the compassionate Redeemer, as nothing has been effected but by his power.

But not only has our Lord already seen of the travail of his soul, but HE STILL DOES SEE of it. His *arm is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither is his ear heavy, that it cannot hear*. In the present day the same doctrine of his atoning sacrifice, applied to the heart by the same Spirit, is attended with the same effects. The

Saviour sees in every quarter of his church, the numbers who repent, believe, and obey the Gospel. He beholds all the effects of the preaching of his cross. When men begin, by his grace, to listen to his invitations, to approach his footstool, to forsake sin, to leave the world, to renounce themselves, and to run the heavenly race, the Redeemer sees every step of the process. And as each humble follower of his cross departs in peace and reaches the realms of glory, a new joy is felt, a new triumph of his grace is achieved, a new fruit and effect of his sufferings obtained.

But the Saviour SHALL SEE HEREAFTER in a still more ample measure this glorious sight. At present little comparatively has been done. The enemies of the Cross are often permitted to prevail. Satan reigns by temptations and lusts, by superstition, infidelity, and false religions. An immense majority of the whole race of mankind is still covered by worse than Egyptian darkness. Paganism and Mohammedanism hang their dark, impenetrable cloud over the fairest portions of the globe. But the Mediator has all things in his hands. *The kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ.* Thousands yet unborn shall become his subjects. *His people shall be willing in the day of his power.* *He must reign till he hath put all enemies under*

his feet. Fit instruments shall be raised up to propagate his truth in all lands. *The ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.* And when all the elect are at length brought to eternal glory, then, and not till then, will the solemn engagement to the Messiah in my text be fully accomplished, and he will see in the most comprehensive sense *of the travail of his soul.*

And with what feelings will he behold the sight? HE SHALL BE SATISFIED. How sublime is the thought! The redemption of sinners will satisfy and fill the mind of the holy Saviour. Intense and unutterable as were his griefs, he shall look back on them with pleasure, when he views the consequences of them in the eternal salvation of men. We know that in proportion to the extent and purity of the mind must be the excellency of the object which can satisfy it. Thus a corrupt and debased person is pleased with an object which would disgust a mind which is holy and elevated. A narrow and uninformed intellect reposes with delight on a topic, which an enlarged and cultivated understanding contemns. Even amidst the truly religious, the knowledge and feelings of a young and inexperienced Christian are gratified with that which the aged and matured Christian considers as trifling or inadequate. If we rise from our own fallen race to the spirits in

glory, and proceed to the consideration of angelic powers and capacities, we are lost in the thought. We are unable to represent to ourselves the design which could fully satiate and engage these exalted beings. What then must be the object which can satisfy the Eternal Saviour, the incomprehensible Word, the Only begotten of the Father! Between the capacities of the most contracted human understanding and that of the loftiest archangel before the throne of God there are, though we may be unable to ascertain them, some measures of proportion, because they are both finite. But between the mind of the highest archangel and that of the Eternal Son of God, there is no proportion, no common term, no mean of comparison. Finite and infinite are severed by an impassable barrier. What then must be the object on which the blessed Redeemer can rest with plenary delight; what the scheme which can satisfy the eternal mind? And when we learn, as we have learned, that the pardon and recovery of us sinners is this object, what exalted ideas must it give us of the value and glory of redemption! We are apt to speak of this stupendous mercy in general and superficial language; but when we catch a glimpse of heaven, and view the adorable Redeemer as contemplating this design, revolving it with ineffable complacency, and filling all his mind with its end-

less consequences ; when we behold this object absorbing his regard, satisfying his wishes, and adding to his joys, we shall begin to estimate it somewhat more according to its real importance.

But we are not merely to consider the salvation of sinners as satisfying the Saviour, but as satisfying him AFTER ALL THE PRECEDING ANGUISH OF HIS SUFFERINGS. *He shall see of the travail of his soul, and seeing it shall, notwithstanding that travail, be satisfied.* What an inexpressible dignity does this consideration confer on the redemption of man! Even in human affairs an object, in order to satisfy the mind, must repay the previous labour and anxiety and expense which the attaining of it has occasioned. If a design has cost us but little, a small measure of success will afford us pleasure. But if immense pain and suffering and privation and solicitude have been incurred in the execution of a particular project, we cannot be satisfied without a proportionate success. Thus the merchantman, after the toil and expense of his search, is satisfied only when he discovers *a pearl of great price.* Thus the physician, after intense application and care, expects and desires the complete recovery of the patient. Thus the parent, after the tenderness and instruction and prayers and tears which a beloved child

has occasioned him, is only fully satiated by its future obedience and piety. To estimate, then, the satisfaction of our Lord in seeing the effects of his sufferings, we must recall what has already been remarked of the extent of them. We must reflect on the infinite condescension of the Saviour in becoming man, in order to endure them. We must consider how little a part of them we are able to comprehend. And then we must endeavour to raise our minds to the grandeur of the success which can compensate for such agonies. But the very mention of these topics overpowers the human mind. The glory of our Lord's divine nature is unspeakable: the depth of his humiliation cannot be fathomed, and the extremity of his passion in the garden and on the cross is beyond all human conception. And yet upon all this agony and woe the Saviour reflects with repose and satisfaction, when he sees the fruits which they have produced. Such is his love to his heavenly Father, such his compassion for sinners, such his view of the bliss of heaven, such his estimate of the horrors of hell, such his apprehension of the consequences of moral evil, and of the state of rational and immortal creatures separated by it from God, that in looking back on all he has endured, and in looking forward to all it is to accom-

plish, he is contented and satiated with the sight.

Already, when upon earth, *he rejoiced in spirit* at the revelation of mercy *to babes*. And now that he is in his glory, he joys *over every sinner that repenteth*. In proportion as all the designs of divine grace are accomplished, his satisfaction augments. And when *the end shall come, and he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when the heathen shall have been given him for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession; when unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places shall be at length displayed all his manifold wisdom; when, surrounded with his redeemed and faithful and elect servants, he shall be celebrated for ever with humble and sublime hallelujahs, and shall be perfectly and uninterruptedly glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that have believed*—then shall he see, in the fullest sense, of the travail of his soul, and be filled with ineffable satisfaction and joy.

But nothing can supply us with adequate conceptions on this great subject. Let us in conclusion observe,

I. The light which it casts on the VALUE OF THE SOUL OF MAN. Both the inconceivable agony of our Lord's passion, and the satisfac-

tion he derives from its effects, suppose the unspeakable worth of the human soul. With God the means are always proportioned to the end. And what was the design to be accomplished by the birth and sufferings of the eternal Word? Was it not to redeem and save men? Was it not to rescue us from everlasting death? Was it not to restore us to the favour and image of God? Was it not to bring us to pardon, holiness, and obedience here, and to endless happiness hereafter? And what is the ground of that satisfaction which the Saviour feels in the consequences of his death, but the inestimable value of the soul? And yet what is it of which mankind think so little as of their souls? What is it which men set so light by, and sacrifice for so base a price? What is it which they give in exchange for the meanest gratifications, and barter for the vilest lusts? What is it which is so forgotten in life, and so neglected in the approach of death? What topic is so difficult to be impressed on the conscience by the ministers of religion? What is so uninteresting, so strange, so forbidding to the hearer? And yet for the redemption of your soul, sinner, all the passion of the gracious Saviour was endured; and from the actual salvation of it his satisfaction is to be derived. Awake, then, to the importance of this subject! Estimate your soul at its true value. Remem-

ber for what it was formed, and of what it is capable. Consider after whose image it was created, and by whose blood redeemed. Judge also from these very circumstances what must be the misery which awaits it, if finally impenitent. Tremble at that hell, to rescue men from which the Son of God was content to leave his glory, and suffer and die. Begin the first duty of a rational and accountable being, the care of the soul. Repent, and believe the Gospel. Approach the once suffering, but now exalted Redeemer, receive his grace, repose your trust on his atonement, devote yourself to his service.

We may notice,

II. The light which this subject reflects on the hope of A PENITENT'S ACCEPTANCE WITH CHRIST. For surely the Saviour will cast out none who come to him. Surely, if he endured such a travail, such anguish of soul and body, a passion so unutterably tremendous, and that for the redemption of sinners, he will never reject any one who sincerely renounces his sins and flies to him. Surely his atonement can reach the case of the worst offender. If he is God as well as man, if his passion was voluntary as well as severe, then no extremity of guilt can exceed the merit of his death; then no sinner need despair—*His blood cleanseth from all sin.* And

if the satisfaction of the Redeemer is described as arising from the sight of the effect of his travail, then assuredly he will welcome and accept the humble and depressed penitent. The salvation of such penitents is the very joy and delight of our compassionate Master, the spoils of his victory, and the reward of his sufferings.

Need I observe,

III. The illustration which this subject supplies of THE POWERFUL MOTIVE, BY WHICH THE CHRISTIAN IS CONSTRAINED TO OBEY HIS SAVIOUR? What can claim and fix our love and obedience, if such sufferings, voluntarily endured for us, cannot? When shall we make any adequate returns for such woe, such anguish, such condescension, such love? Where is the heart that has really felt its sins and the extent of its obligation to the travail of the Redeemer's soul, which does not burn to sacrifice every lust at his cross, to devote every power, to employ every exertion, to express every act of gratitude and obedience? Surely being *not our own, but bought with a price, we should glorify God in our bodies and in our spirits, which are his.*

Lastly I must notice,

IV. The light this subject throws on THE

FUTURE PROPAGATION OF THE GOSPEL THROUGH-
OUT THE WORLD. For, if the engagement of
the Covenant of Redemption expressly be, as
we have learned, that our Lord *shall see
of the travail of his soul and be satisfied*, then
we may go forth in the cause of missions and of
the Bible with a humble confidence. Our trust
is not in an arm of flesh. The sufferings of
the Redeemer are the pledge of our success;
the word of prophecy is our encouragement;
the promise and oath of God our security. We
are indeed of ourselves unable to effect a single
conversion. We are unworthy to be engaged
in such a cause. But our Saviour bids us pro-
ceed, and engages to *be with us even unto the
end of the world*. We have little to do or to
suffer, compared with what he endured for us;
yet he accounts all our attempts as proofs of
our love. Then, shall we not occupy ourselves
with that which is his chosen object? Shall
we not endeavour to share, so to speak, his sa-
tisfaction? Shall not our hearts be filled and
elevated with a design which contents and sa-
tiates the mind of the Son of God? Yes, bless-
ed Saviour, in thy strength we will go forward.
We will approach every accessible part of the
globe. We will circulate in all quarters thy
sacred Word. We will send the missionary to
proclaim thy cross: and in doing this, we will

repose our confidence in thy power and thy grace, in the efficacy of thy Spirit and the influence of thy love ; nor will we cease our endeavours till thy truth illuminate and bless mankind, and the whole earth be at length filled with thy ineffable glory.

SERMON VIII.

THE COURSE OF THE WORLD.



EPHESIANS, II. 2.

*Wherein in time past ye walked according to the
course of this world.*

A DISPOSITION to sin against God can convert the most innocent things into an occasion of evil. The social principle in man, which is the fruitful source of so many blessings, is, through our depravity, the cause of various dangers. Few subjects, therefore, are more important than the one proposed to us in the text. It is observable that the Apostle, when he had declared that the Ephesians, previously to their conversion, had been *dead in trespasses and sins*, states, as the proof of this, that they had walked according to the custom and mode of the world around them; most obviously implying that, since corruption had spread over the whole nature of man, it was sufficient to say that the Ephesians followed the general usages of the great body of mankind, in order

to prove that they were dead as to God and spiritual religion.

Our subject then is, THE COURSE OF THE WORLD ; which may be considered, as to its general nature, and as to its particular modifications. We shall consider,

I. THE SPIRIT OF THIS WORLD, AS TO ITS GENERAL NATURE.

By the expression, The spirit or course of this world, is meant the collected force of that habitual neglect of God and supreme love of things present, in which the great mass of mankind live. Men being fallen from God and ignorant of spiritual religion, are, when united in society, like a vast current made up of a thousand streams, and flowing with a proportionately augmented violence. As each separately loves sin and pleasure, and delights in the honours and riches and enjoyments of sense, their combined movements are like the action of some great and complicated machine of an endless variety of parts, each contributing to the momentum of the whole. As every individual is inflamed by the pursuit of appetite and pleasure, the general effect is like the progress of a vast conflagration raised to tenfold extent and fury by the prodigious accumulation of materials. By the spirit of the world, then, is meant the aggregate force of the ge-

neral notions, customs, and practices of the great bulk of mankind, so far as their habits and opinions are contrary to the will of God.

Of this the SCRIPTURES frequently speak. From the passage connected with my text, we learn that worldly persons are in a state of spiritual death, are subject to Satan, are under the rule of ungoverned passions, and exposed to divine wrath; *And you—were dead in trespasses and sins, wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience; among whom also we all had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.* From other passages we learn that *all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world; that the friendship of the world is enmity against God; that wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat; that the cares of this life, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things, choke the seed of truth, and make it unfruitful; and that we must not be conformed to this world, but be transformed in the renewing of our mind.*

EXAMPLES of this worldly spirit in a greater or less degree, abound both in the cases of persons wholly sensual and ungodly, and in those of more religious and hopeful characters. The young ruler who *went away from our Lord sorrowful because he had great possessions*, is an example of amiable and decent persons who are yet too much attached to the possessions of this world. Martha *cumbered with much serving*, though on the whole a faithful disciple of our Lord, yet exhibits a specimen of persons too anxious about its subordinate duties. The rich fool who *pulled down his barns and built greater*, is an example of those who yield to ease and sensuality: Dives, *clothed with purple and fine linen and faring sumptuously every day*, of the luxurious and splendid; the guests *who made light of the marriage supper*, and pleaded their different excuses, are a specimen of the indifferent and careless; Saul the Pharisee, of the proud and self-righteous; Judas, of the covetous and base; Nabal, of the gross and churlish; Solomon, of the learned and voluptuous; Lot's wife, of those who are lovers of pleasure; Eli, of the easy and unfaithful; Jehoshaphat, of the feeble and irresolute; the Laodiceans, of declining professors of religion; and Demas, of apostates, who appear utterly to forsake the ways of Christ.

From these various instances, compared

with the passages of Holy Writ which preceded them, we may collect that the GOVERNING PRINCIPLE of the world, when it wholly prevails, is the *labouring only for the meat that perisheth, the neglecting of salvation, the forsaking of God the fountain of living waters*; in one word, the *minding earthly things*, THE CARNAL MIND, the *φρόνημα τῆς σαρκός*; or, as it is in the words following my text, *the fulfilling of the desires of the flesh and of the mind*. From this main principle, as from a secret but exuberant spring, the mighty current of ungodliness flows.

The SYSTEM of conduct to which this governing principle leads, is that of practical irreligion in the heart and life. Under this general description, almost every kind of irreligious persons may be included. It is not necessary to pursue a course of gross and flagrant immoralities in order to be of the world; though even these are but too much countenanced. Men may be decent, benevolent, honest, reputable, punctual, and even virtuous in the ordinary sense of the expression, and yet give their society and apparent sanction to persons of the most opposite habits, and thus be on the best terms with the general body of men around them. Nor is it necessary that the pursuits which men are engaged in, should be in themselves unlawful. The most innocent avocations or employments, if immoderately

loved and pursued, become criminal and destructive. Nor is it necessary to follow an uninterrupted round of trifling recreations and pleasures. Men of the world may act on the idea that cessation quickens enjoyment. They may either abstain altogether from amusements, if it is not done from religious motives, and supported by a consistent piety; or they may partake of them with moderation, or withdraw from them for a season, that they may return to a life of vanity with a keener relish. Even a sort of religion, so far as a regard to some external duties extends, is compatible with a neglect of genuine piety. There may be a decent religion in very worldly persons; which is meager, cold, occasional, proud, formal; sustained for the sake of example to inferiors, to satisfy conscience and to compensate for sin; which is neither earnest nor spiritual, which means little and effects less. This is the general idea of what may be termed the system of this world. Proceeding according to this, the world has its maxims, occupations, amusements, applause, disapprobation, estimate of good and evil, and terms of admission to its society and friendship. The sum of it is, that if the governing principle remain in force—THE MINDING OF THE FLESH—every thing else is tolerated by them, whether it appears to incline towards decency

and public virtue on the one hand, or towards open irreligion and profligacy on the other.

It will be easy to gather from these remarks the OBJECT to which this system is tacitly directed by its followers. It is that of countenancing each other in the ways of religious indifference and folly. Such men are cowards when alone. Conscience accuses; guilt disturbs. They *flee when no man pursueth*. But *when hand joins in hand*, they can face the danger. When the rich, the great, the wise, the learned, the acute, the powerful unite in certain plans of life, certain amusements, certain maxims; men conclude that all is right. They thus contrive to forget the calls of religion, to exclude reflection, to silence conscience, to escape retirement, to lose themselves in engagements and occupation, to fill up the void which sin has made, to frame a scheme of sensual happiness, and to do without God and serious religion. In the hurry of company, crowds, tumult, dress, conversation, business, speculations, rank, power, enterprise, and the love of admiration, the passions are excited, time consumed, the remaining scruples of religious feeling overcome, and the sensuality of the earthly heart gratified and confirmed.

The DECEITFULNESS of this course of the world is remarkable. Men fall into it almost imperceptibly; the stream carries them along.

They merely follow the example of others. The descent is easy and gradual. One generation succeeds another in the same round of thoughtlessness or laborious trifling. They go on without trouble, contrivance, or direct intention, *fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind*. Multitudes of such persons have no idea how far they have departed from the paths of real religion, do not suspect whither the course which they pursue will lead them, and are highly displeased with those who warn them of their danger. Nor are plausible delusions wanting to draw on the too willing travellers. Religion is traduced by many around them as enthusiasm, and separation from the follies or spirit of mankind as misanthropy; the intoxicating pleasures of sense are represented as excusable at least, if not blameless; the tumult of dissipation as innocent enjoyment; and the impure and often destructive fascinations of public and social diversions as allowable recreations and harmless amusements. An intense devotion of heart to earthly cares and employments is further considered as the discharge of necessary duties: whilst the pleas of family connexions, dependence on others, general custom, the laws of honour, station in life, and good intentions, unite with the dread of reproach and the fear of man, to lead the multitude forward in unsuspected captivity. Thus the deceitfulness of

the world is its strength. It first blinds and then ruins men. And as it has always the multitude on its side, it has no difficulty in softening things by giving them spurious names, in establishing corrupt maxims, erecting a delusive standard, diffusing around every object a false atmosphere, and rejecting the friendly interference which would detect the illusion, and deliver men from its influence.

Need I then stop to speak of the FORCE of the world? It diffuses itself, like the waters of a mighty flood, on every side. None but they who are *born of God* ever really overcome it. It has been the same in all ages and circumstances. If it be impeded and obstructed in one channel, it bursts out in another. It bears down the restraints of education and conscience, and overflows the embankments which law or morals or religion may erect. Where it cannot flow in a full torrent, it insinuates itself by a secret course. The young and amiable, whom religion especially addresses, and whose hearts, yet tender, might be thought most susceptible of piety, are hurried along, as well as the aged and infirm, from whose feeble but anxious grasp all earthly objects are escaping. The acute and penetrating, whose minds, enlarged by science, might be supposed to be engaged in higher pursuits, and who cannot but detect the miserable folly of a worldly life,

minge in the throng with the uneducated, the frivolous, and the gay. The disappointed still press onward in the train, only to renew their disappointments. The very ministers of the sanctuary are in some instances not altogether free from the infection, and confirm by the exhibition of a low standard of religious feeling and instruction, the errors of the unthinking multitude. Even those who, in the spirit of a proud philosophy, openly inveigh against the trifles of life, submit to the tyranny of them. Erected, in a word, upon the foundation of a corrupt heart, the spirit of the world acts with a force which nothing short of the energy of true and spiritual religion, derived from the almighty grace and boundless love of Christ Jesus, can effectually withstand.

Such is the general course of the world. Such its principle, its system, its object, its deceitfulness, and its force. In every age it presents these common and prominent features. Man is an apostate creature, and the course in which he naturally walks is carnal, earthly, ignoble; almost as much inferior to the dignity of his origin, as it is below the grandeur of those heavenly expectations which ought to fill and elevate his soul. Still there are varieties arising from the different circumstances of mankind which deserve a separate notice.

This leads me to consider,

II. THE PARTICULAR MODIFICATIONS OF THE SPIRIT OF THE WORLD.

For, besides the general spirit of it which we have been considering, there are particular determinations of this spirit, which incessantly vary according to times, places, and circumstances. Like the tide, the course of the world ever rolls on, but in different directions and different channels. Some streams may be choked up, as others are opened; the flood in some places may flow wider and deeper than in others. But these variations do not materially affect our preceding observations. Man is the same, the law of God the same, the nature of sin, and the designs of the tempter the same. It is only necessary to trace the governing principle, the system and the object of a worldly life, and we shall find it to be essentially the same under every apparent dissimilarity.

Thus, if we regard CHRISTENDOM GENERALLY, we must allow that the public profession of Christianity, the progress of civilization, and the several laws and usages consequent upon them, have considerably altered the course of the world from what it was when heathen idolatry, or Jewish pride and superstition, opposed with undisguised malice the name and purposes of the Saviour. Some sins, once not disreputable, are now held in abomination. Some duties,

especially those of benevolence, are now so creditable and popular, that they are generally extolled and pretended to. Christian laws, education, and information have had an influence on the standard of moral and religious sentiments and feelings. Still a worldly life, though somewhat varied in its form, is in its substance the same. The corrupt heart still cherishes its cold indifference, its folly and levity, its vice and carnality. The distinction between the world and the spiritual and invisible church of Christ is as real now as it was in the days of the Apostles, and the passages of Scripture which refer to it may be applied to us in the present day with strong, and in all the main points, with unabated force.

IN OUR OWN COUNTRY, again, the course of the world has been greatly altered by that pure light of the Gospel which shines in our reformed church, by our high notions of civil and religious freedom, by the enterprising spirit of our people, and by the great progress of general reading and information amongst all classes. He however who thinks himself free from a worldly spirit because he is not superstitious, ignorant, rude, credulous, uncourteous; or because he observes some religious duties, or because he is free from notorious profligacy, or because he believes and defends the national Protestant creed, may greatly deceive himself,

The course of the world may flow here in another channel. He may be free from the fashionable errors and vices of the sixteenth century, to which he has little temptation; but he may be entangled in those of his own. A false candour, fastidiousness, pride, insubordination, unbounded personal expense, inordinate appetite for pleasure, gross selfishness, sober sensuality, vanity of knowledge, daring criticism on sacred subjects, sceptical speculations in philosophy, an adulation of talents however perverted, a contempt for real spiritual religion, an indifference to the peculiar doctrines and self-denying duties of Christianity, a rage for amusements, and a love of display, are at least as dangerous now, as credulity and superstition were three centuries ago.

Still further varieties in the course of the world are created by THE CLASS OF SOCIETY in which we happen to move. Each of these has its peculiar pretensions. The philosophers have their world, where a lofty pretence to wisdom and virtue unconnected with religion, is commonly in vogue. The statesmen have theirs, where political intrigue, the interests of party, and of personal ambition, are too apt to prevail; where religion is chiefly consigned to the low and uneducated, and is treated as little more than an engine of state to restrain the multitude, whilst public talent and address are deem-

ed a sufficient substitute for it among the great. The scholars have also a world to themselves, are often too proud to be taught of God, lean to their own understanding, idolize talent, are fastidious, daring, and sceptical. The learned professions too commonly fall into this class. The divines have also their theatre. There is a course of the world in theology, a time when certain humiliating doctrines or painful duties are commonly omitted and decried, and others tolerated and applauded. Nay, the very same points of religion which are maintained at one time, are rejected at another. At one season the plainest tenets of our national church—such as the total corruption of human nature and justification by faith alone, are questioned; at another, they are tacitly admitted, and the regenerating and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit become the prevalent topics of controversial discussion. In this circle, the humble and sober minister, if he decidedly disallows these dangerous inconsistencies, comes out from among the worldly part of the visible church, and *knows nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified*, is frequently branded with some name of reproach. The nobles and gentry have, again, a circle to themselves: the merchants and tradesmen have also theirs. Thus, in all the gradations of society, down to the humblest walks of life, there are separate

worlds, as it were, in which men move. I am not here to be understood as censuring, in the remotest sense, the right and pious exercise of any of these several vocations. Men may be Christian philosophers, and statesmen, and scholars, and divines; and so of every other lawful profession or employment. But I speak of the particular modifications of a worldly spirit which have in all ages prevailed in these subdivisions of human society.

In the several courses which each class pursues, the governing principle of minding earthly things, together with the results arising from it of living without practical religion, are uniformly the same. It is not, then, the class of society, but the state of mind, which is mainly to be regarded. A man may be as worldly in his study, as another in the camp. A rustic may be as far from serious piety in his village, with his markets his fairs and his festivals, as the merchant in the town with his more luxurious indulgences. The mother of a family may be as worldly-minded in the circle of her children and her domestics, as the thoughtless youth in the maze of dissipation and folly. All depends on the state of the heart. If the love and faith of Christ govern the soul, the Christian may be spiritually minded and accepted of God in the senate or the court, as in the cases of John Baptist or of Nehemiah; and if the

love of earthly things, under whatever disguise, predominate, the ecclesiastic may be secular even in the pulpit. The different classes of society have each their select company, can see the errors of others, and perhaps condemn their faults ; and yet agree in a real indifference to God and salvation. The question is, not whether we are distinct and separate from the world as it presents itself in a shape to which we have little temptation ; but whether we are distinct from it as it shows itself in our own class and circle of life. To consider the worldly spirit as it displays itself in those much above us in station, or in those much below us, will be of little benefit. The rocks and currents of the ocean in another hemisphere are less necessary to be known by us. Our chief concern is, to avoid the shoals and quicksands in those latitudes where our vessel is actually sailing.

To do this effectually, we must carefully consider OUR OWN DISPOSITION AND CIRCUMSTANCES. Self-knowledge must lie at the foundation of a knowledge of the course of the world. The art of Satan is employed in adapting his temptations to our own special character and temper. Our education, natural turn of mind, family, property, duties, difficulties, must all be considered, if we would detect the governing principle of our hearts, and learn whether earthly or spiritual things chiefly influence

us. It is easy to abstain from that species of the love of the world to which our health or temperament is opposed. It is easy to escape from one snare of this dexterous enemy, whilst we fall into another. We may easily avoid display and extravagance, if we are covetous. We naturally refrain from indiscriminate association with others, if we are proud or morose. We find no difficulty in shunning public amusements, if we are infirm in health. We may readily decline trifling conversation, if we are much occupied. We may abstain from dissipation, if we are ambitious. We may avoid irregularities of conduct, if we are jealous of our character. We may shrink from tumultuous scenes of pleasure, if we are reserved, and from those which are expensive, if we are indigent. And yet the love of earthly things, in the shape most convenient and easy to us at our age and with our particular disposition and pursuits, may reign undisturbed; the heart may seek after vanity, and the love of God and a holy life be far from our thoughts. With all these and a thousand other modifications, the world may still be our God, and the whole soul be fixed on the objects of sense and time.

Allow me, then, in drawing towards a conclusion,

I. To point out the way in which WE MAY BE DELIVERED FROM THE SPIRIT OF THE WORLD.

In order to this, we must, first of all, strive, under God's blessing and grace, to be **SERIOUS**. "It is the business of religion to quicken vigilance, as it is the design of the world to lay it asleep." Till men are serious and in earnest about their salvation, little can be hoped from them. A vain trifling mind, on which nothing makes an impression, is perhaps the most unfavourable of all dispositions to religion. Repentance is a serious thing: faith is a serious thing: the soul is a serious thing: death, judgment, eternity, heaven and hell, are all serious things. Even in the concerns of this life, no important matter can be accomplished by a trifler. How much less then in religion! And yet I may appeal to the consciences of men, whether the whole tendency of their present course of life, if they love the world, is not that of *making light* of Christ and his salvation. Withdraw then from the giddy throng. Take up the duties of Christianity with solemnity and earnestness. Trifle no longer with the crowd, but listen to the voice of conscience and Scripture.

I say, listen to the voice of Scripture: for **THE STUDY OF THE BIBLE** is one of the most imperious duties of a serious and awakened mind. Read that holy book. See what it states of man, of God, of the law of God, of the danger of sin. See what it declares of human corruption, of redemption, and of the

way of pardon and holiness. Read its instructions as to the real nature and spirituality of religion, as to the demand which God makes of the whole heart, as to the duties of faith, love, and communion with Heaven. Study what it testifies against the world, as *lying in wickedness*, as *being in a state of enmity against God*. Meditate on its warnings as to the value of time, the uncertainty of death, the danger of an impenitent state, and the deceitfulness of sin. And when you have read this, pause and tell me whether you are not required to *love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength*; tell me whether *you will be profited, if you gain the whole world and lose your own soul*; tell me whether you are not to *glorify God in your body and your spirit, which are his*; tell me, in a word, whether the kind of religion depicted in the Bible admits of a worldly life, of dissipated affections, of inflamed passions, of a trifling waste of time, and a supreme love of gain, or pleasure, or applause.

Pass on from these studies to FERVENT PRAYER FOR THE RENEWING GRACE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. When you discover your weakness and irresolution, the seduction of example and the force of habit, then implore that new disposition of heart, that heavenly and sacred change, that entire regeneration of the soul, which may issue in a truly holy and religious life. Be

not cast into despair whilst you view your duty and yet your infirmity, your danger and yet your frailty and corruption ; but learn that the grace and power of the Holy Spirit are precisely calculated to assist and strengthen you. This divine and almighty Sanctifier can deliver you from the world, can implant in you the seeds of a new nature, can show you the sinfulness of a sensual life, and convince you of the possibility of living the life of a Christian. Thus the very doctrine of the influence of the Holy Spirit, which you once misunderstood and perhaps despised, shall become your consolation and your joy. Implore then the illumination and strength of this blessed Spirit of God, that you may be enabled to *come out from the world and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing, that God may receive you, and you may become the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.*

Let prayer be followed up by A DETERMINED EFFORT IN THE PATH OF DUTY. Prayer without practice is hypocrisy. Boldly act then on the dictates of conscience. Give up what you know to be wrong. Besides the general course of the world in the less gross sense of the expression, you are, in all probability, living in various other habits which you know to be contrary to the will of God. Renounce them. Whatever reproach may attach to you, venture to

obey God rather than man. By acting up to the light you have, you may expect more. Break through all opposition; for your soul and eternity are at stake. All intercourse with the profligate part of those around you avoid, and avoid it at once. That measure of necessary association with irreligious persons which is connected with your real duties to society or to your family, jealously watch over. Court retirement; cultivate a spirit of devotion; keep holy the Lord's day; conceal not your new views and determinations. Honour God by your repentance; edify your neighbour by your example.

In doing this, be WISE AND HUMBLE as well as resolute. Do not affect singularities. Do not mistake self-will for decision. Do not indulge your own bad tempers, and then talk of persecution. Do not spoil what is substantially good by indelicacy or unnecessary abruptness. Be wise and prudent. Show the true spirit of separation from the world, not by being scrupulous in things really indifferent, but by love to Christ, by delight in holiness, by the fear of God, and by the ardent pursuit of higher objects. Unite with these, condescension, cheerfulness, courteousness, charity. Be more exact than ever in the discharge of those duties which fall under the notice of worldly persons. Especially if you are in younger life,

honour and obey your parents and superiors in all things, not absolutely and clearly sinful. Thus will your victory over the world be real and permanent.

Lastly, DEVOTE YOURSELVES UNRESERVEDLY TO THE SERVICE OF CHRIST. You can only escape the tyranny of the world, by entering the service of a better Lord. In proportion as you transfer your thoughts and affections to your Saviour, will your distaste for a merely earthly life be strengthened. You will have no time nor inclination for vanity and folly. The cross of Christ seen by faith, will enable you to crucify the world. It will bring you pardon and victory. It will engage you in another cause, occupy you with other objects, and introduce you into other society. It will detect all the glare and imposition of earthly things. The mysterious death of the incarnate Saviour will fix your heart, produce hatred of sin, reconcile you to reproach, deliver you from the fear of man, and make obedience delightful,

But lastly, allow me,

II. TO CAUTION THE TRUE CHRISTIAN AGAINST THE INFLUENCE OF THE WORLD. Though delivered from it as to its open vices and follies, though separated from its public scenes and temptation, and professedly engaged in warfare with it, yet you are still in constant danger. This

you may learn from the examples of a worldly temper which I before adduced from Scripture in the case of persons who were the true servants of God, as Lot, and Eli, and Jehoshaphat, and Martha. Especially is the danger great in a day of extended religious profession like the present. There is now a world even in the Church of God. A man may lose his religion, and become altogether carnal in the midst of religious concerns and occupations. There are borderers, as it were, living on the confines of the two kingdoms. These form a world of their own, where measured degrees of vanity, dress, company, trifling, ostentation, ambition, are tacitly countenanced; where plain honest spirituality of heart and life is in disgrace; and where the abstinence from public places of amusement and a few other grosser practices of irreligion, serves to quicken the appetite for every possible indulgence which is still within reach. From the spirit and practice and maxims and standard of these persons, the zealous Christian will stand aloof, that he may commune with his Saviour, that he may devote his time to the duties and charities of his station, that he may study his Bible, that he may walk with God, and adorn his Gospel in all things. It will be his inquiry, not how near he may approach to the world, but how far he ought to recede from it. Far from living in

trembling anxiety as to the judgment of the world, or asking the half-hearted and timid professor, to what point he will allow him to proceed without affixing on him some name of contempt; he will pant after a complete resemblance to Christ his Lord, and will pray that, in the full sense of the expression, he *may not be of the world, even as his Master was not of the world.*

SERMON IX.

A FORM OF GODLINESS.

2 TIMOTHY, III. 5.

Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.

THERE are two parts of religion, the internal and the external. Each of these is important; but in very different degrees. The inward grace of religion is the life of the whole, and gives all the value to its outward appearances. The ordinances of it are excellent, if they are regarded as a means rather than an end; but if they are substituted for inward piety, they become injurious and dangerous. Thus the Apostle instructs us, that in the perilous times of the last dispensation of the church, men shall learn to unite every possible vice, with an outward adherence to the rituals of Christianity; shall retain the form whilst they deny the power of godliness. And though the ordinary cases which occur in the present day are far from being so aggravated as those described by the Apostle, yet the tendency of

human nature is ever the same. A large class of mankind are always prone to neglect the real spirit and influence of religion, and to overvalue its outward observances. Let us then consider,

I. The power of godliness.

II. The mere form of it.

We are to notice,

I. THE POWER OF GODLINESS.

The term GODLINESS is, strictly considered, a due love and obedience to the blessed God; but it is ordinarily employed in the Scriptures, in a larger sense, for the whole of true religion. This begins in the conversion of the heart by the grace of the Holy Spirit. It leads to sincere repentance. It brings a man to believe cordially in the name of Jesus Christ for pardon and justification through his vicarious sacrifice and atonement. It produces a love to God and holiness, a delight in prayer, a value for the Bible, a mortification of remaining sinful passions, charity to our neighbour, separation from the sins and corruptions of the world, meekness, humility, circumspection, tenderness of conscience, and a desire to discharge every personal and relative duty. Thus the sinner, who was formerly ungodly and careless about his salvation, becomes *a new creature in Christ*

Jesus, and lives a sober, righteous, and godly life.

If this be the nature of godliness, THE POWER OF IT must be that sacred influence, by which the genuine spirit of it is communicated, and the holy effects of it are produced; that energy by which it transforms, converts, and sanctifies the whole man. If the doctrine of godliness is lowered and explained away, its power will disappear. But when the true grace of Christ Jesus, the real and effectual work of the blessed Spirit, the inward life of God in the heart, and the pure and devoted obedience of a Christian conduct, are duly insisted upon in the language and manner of the Holy Scriptures, then the virtue and loveliness of religion will be preserved, the efficacy of it, as well as the name. Thus the Apostle speaks of *the Gospel of Christ, as being the POWER of God unto salvation*. Thus the Thessalonians received it, *not as the word of men, but, as it was in truth, the word of God, which EFFECTUALLY WORKED in them that believed*. The Gospel is also said to have come to the same Thessalonians, *not in word only, but also in POWER, and in the Holy Ghost, and they became followers of the apostles and of the Lord; so that they were ensamples to all the believers, having turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God*. And thus the truth of the Gospel came to the Co-

lossians, and brought forth fruit, since the day they heard it and knew the grace of God in truth.

This *power of godliness* IS MANIFEST IN THE VARIOUS HISTORIES OF THE TRUE SERVANTS OF GOD, which are found in the Holy Scriptures. Abraham, by this efficacy of religion, came out from his country and his kindred at the call of God, and afterwards offered up his only son Isaac at his command. Jacob *waited for God's salvation*. Joseph resisted the temptation to which he was exposed, and said, *How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?* Moses also *refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter*. Ruth resolved to cleave to Naomi and the worship of the one Jehovah. Joshua *followed the Lord fully*. Hezekiah was a holy example to his generation. Manasseh humbled himself greatly before the Lord. Josiah sought the Lord with his whole heart. Daniel braved the den of lions, and the three children the fiery furnace, for conscience sake. *And what shall I say more? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Sampson, and of Jephthae, of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets, who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouth of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong,*

waxed valiant in the fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

I need not do more than allude to the cases in the New Testament of Matthew and Zaccheus, and Paul, and Lydia, and the Philippian jailor, and Onesimus, and others, which are familiar to every student of Scripture, and which concur with the histories in the Old Testament, to display to us the nature of this important topic, the transforming efficacy of real religion.

It is impossible, I think, not to see from this enumeration, what is meant by the *power of godliness*. Because, separating in the cases of these persons every thing properly supernatural or peculiar, it is yet evident that there was a force and reality in their religion, a life and vigour, a spirituality and devotedness, a sacrifice of their own will and a resignation to that of God, a separation from the world, and a zeal for the divine glory, which distinguished their whole character from that of cold, timid, double-minded and insincere persons.

THE POWER, THEN, OF GODLINESS, IN THE ORDINARY TIMES OF THE CHURCH, will consist in a real and effectual conversion of the whole heart to God, in opposition to a merely external reformation. It will appear in a cordial reception of Christ Jesus in his whole salvation as the *wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and*

redemption of sinners, in opposition to a nominal faith in him. It will produce a simple, unaffected, and continual dependence on the mighty operation of the Holy Ghost for every good thought, desire, and action, in opposition to a merely general reference to his aid. It will be seen in a spiritual and heavenly state of the heart and affections, which delights in prayer and communion with God, and honours the holy sabbath, in opposition to a cold performance of some of the outward duties of religion. It will manifest itself in a fervent love to Christ, which constrains the whole soul, and wins it to speak of his name, and glory in his cross, in opposition to indifference and neglect. It will appear in a circumspect walk, an abstraction from the world, and a dread of temptation, in opposition to a conformity to the manners of the age. It will be seen in a zeal for the glory of God, and an activity and enterprise in promoting the salvation of others, in opposition to a selfish indolence. It will appear in the humble, meek, and forgiving temper of Christ Jesus, in opposition to pride and revenge and the spirit of party. In a word, the power of godliness is religion in action — religion governing the understanding, the will, the affections, and the life. It is the real deliverance of the captive; it is the actual erection of the spiritual edifice; it is the positive recovery of

the patient ; it is the perceptible warmth of life ; it is the holy birth and growth of the soul in piety ; it is Christ *dwelling in the heart by faith* ; it is the *translation from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son*. These effects, indeed, are not produced in an equal degree in all sincere Christians ; but this is the test, this the criterion, by which the real *power of religion* may be ascertained ; and to attain to this, and more than this, is the supreme object and aim of all true servants of God.

But we come now to consider what is meant,
II. BY THE MERE FORM OF GODLINESS—
Having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.

Here it is to be observed, in the very first instance, that the dangerous state of mind described in these words does not consist in having the form of religion, but in so adhering to the form as to deny, either directly or virtually, its power. THE OUTWARD FORMS OF RELIGION ARE PRESCRIBED BY GOD HIMSELF, AND ARE ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY FOR MAN. As we have bodies as well as souls, external institutions are indispensable to us. Secret and family devotions must have decent forms, or they will soon decline. The public worship of Almighty God must be preserved and regulated by appointed services. No wise person ever undervalues

order. Man is too weak to stand alone; and it is the mark of true humility to employ those means in which it pleases God ordinarily to convey his grace. One of the first operations, indeed, of the power of devotion will be to create a reverence for its forms. The Apostles instruct us to *do all things decently and in order*, and to consider the custom of the churches of Christ as a sufficient, and even an authoritative, guide to us in indifferent points. *He that troubleth their peace or union, will bear his judgment, whosoever he be.* We are to hold fast the *form of sound words*; and to obey them that have the rule over us, esteeming them very highly in love for their work's sake.

The state of heart, then, which the Apostle condemns is the so overvaluing the external services of religion as to neglect or despise that power of it, for the promotion of which those services were instituted. The offence condemned is the putting the name of piety for the thing. It is the sinking of religion in its mere appendages. It is the stopping in our course exactly where we should begin; the resting in a form, instead of employing it to conduct us to a higher end. Where this fatal mistake is made, the progress from bad to worse is commonly rapid; and men quickly learn to deny practically, if not avowedly, the power of inward and spiritual religion.

THE TENDENCY OF THE HUMAN HEART GENERALLY IS TO OVER-ESTIMATE THE OUTWARD FORMS OF PIETY. Form is by far the easiest part of religion. It suits the pride and self-righteousness of our fallen nature, it soothes the uneasiness of a guilty mind, it commends us to the good opinion of our fellow-creatures, it is soonest performed, it is all of which the unawakened mind feels the want, it puts us on an apparent level with the pious and devout, it strikes the senses, it silences the clamours of conscience. On the other hand, to ascend to God, to pray with the whole heart, to examine our religious state, to rely on the alone merits of Christ, to cultivate inward principles of piety, to *see Him who is invisible, to walk by faith, to keep ourselves in the love of God*, to mortify selfishness and pride, are secret and spiritual and difficult duties. The human heart finds nothing in them to rest upon, nothing to gratify a good opinion of itself. Accordingly, in all ages of the church, an undue regard to the forms of religion has been a prevalent and most insidious danger.

Thus Saul, with rebellion and envy in his heart, still addressed Samuel and David and his own courtiers, in the forms of piety. Thus the Jews in their most corrupt state were accustomed to say, *The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we. They drew near to God with their mouths and honoured him with their*

lips, but removed their heart far from him. They called themselves by the name of Jacob, and stayed themselves upon the God of Israel, but not in truth nor in righteousness. They came to the Prophet as God's people, and sat before him, and heard his words, but they would not do them. Thus Absalom disguised his rebellion and treason under the pretence of performing a vow in Hebron. The Pharisees likewise in our Lord's time made broad their phylacteries, and enlarged the borders of their garments, and prayed standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they might be seen of man. Herod observed John, and did many things, and heard him gladly. Simon the sorcerer believed. Ananias and Sapphira, in compliance with the regulations of the church, sold the inheritance; and Judas betrayed his Master with the outward expressions of affection and reverence.

And in our own times and in a reformed apostolical church, our simple, solemn, and edifying religious services are frequently, it is to be feared, abused to the ends of self-righteousness and pride. This is not the fault of those formularies; it is the fault of human nature. Men by degrees thus pervert the offices of religion. They forget that mere bodily services are of no value in the sight of God without the heart. They proceed in a routine of decent observ-

ances, whilst their affections are in fact rivetted on the world, ambition, pleasure, gain. They are present where prayer is offered up, but they do not pray. They adopt the words of supplication, but neglect the spirit and feeling. They listen to the reading of God's word, but without any spiritual understanding. They admit the truths of Christianity, but without application or effect. They attend to some duties of piety on a part of the Sunday, but return to the pursuit of the world before the day is closed. Thus they have the form, but not the power of godliness.

And not having felt this power, they commonly next proceed to THE DEPRECIATION OF IT. The natural enmity of the human mind to spiritual religion is fostered by a mere observance of the outward fashion of piety. An over-eager attention to the name, diverts the eye from the substance. They quite forget what religion is, and what it should do for them. Repentance for sin, contrition and humiliation, are disregarded. Faith in Christ as our alone righteousness, and love to him as our divine Lord, are unknown. Spiritual affections, delight in prayer, watchfulness over the heart, the dread of sin, forgiveness of injuries, lowliness, meekness, resignation, fear, are things strange and unwelcome: whilst vanity, dress, display, amusements, business, company, indolence, selfishness,

pride, forgetfulness of God, and neglect of the Gospel, govern the heart, and govern it with more influence because the form of godliness lulls to rest the ill-informed conscience.

From this state of mind the descent is easy to the MISREPRESENTATION AND ABUSE of the power of religion. I place these together, because it is commonly Satan's art first to maim, as it were, and disfigure the fair countenance of religion, and then to expose it to contempt or ridicule. Men, who extravagantly magnify the mere externals of religion, continually misrepresent really spiritual piety as fanaticism, scriptural holiness as unnecessary strictness, genuine love to God as enthusiasm, real obedience as severity. To increase the deformity of the picture, the failings of the good are zealously proclaimed, their mistakes exaggerated, their defects in human learning or ability detailed, the scandals occasioned by false professors of religion charged upon the whole body, and differences of sentiment on smaller points magnified into fundamental disagreements. Thus the power of religion being perpetually viewed through the medium of prejudice, is brought into contempt, and the form of it is almost exclusively regarded and followed.

AN ERRONEOUS SYSTEM OF RELIGIOUS DOCTRINE is frequently called in to support this inefficacious semblance of piety. The fashionable

errors of the day are usually sufficient for this purpose. Infidelity and Socinianism mislead some; but a low and false estimate of the great and genuine features of the Gospel betrays and ruins by far the greater number. Men learn to conceive lightly or falsely of man's total fall and apostacy from God, of the almighty operations of divine grace, of the necessity of regeneration by the Holy Spirit, of justification by faith alone, of union with Christ, of deadness to the world, of devotedness to God, of unreserved and consistent obedience to his commands. In the place of this, the notion of a remedial law, of meritorious conditions in the covenant of grace, of a double justification, of spiritual grace necessarily, uniformly, and almost exclusively conveyed in baptism, and in the Supper of the Lord, tends directly to depreciate the importance of real godliness, and to substitute merely human endeavour, a dead faith, a general and indefinite notion of a Saviour, the decent exterior of religion, and a civil conduct in society, for the virtue, and life, and grace, and unction, and spirituality of true and unadulterated Christianity.

And now the formal worshipper is prepared to DENY, as the text expresses it, the power of godliness. MANY DO THIS DIRECTLY and ABSOLUTELY. They contend against all real spiritual piety. They actually reject the whole system of

instruction which is founded on the doctrine of the entire fall and corruption of our nature, and the necessity of a radical and universal change of heart and life. They sometimes proceed to an open opposition against these plain and essential truths, and those who sincerely and cordially receive them. In their families and neighbourhoods, they mark with contempt the individuals who maintain and exhibit the influence and force of divine grace. So far as the laws of our land will allow it, they will even pursue the true Christian by direct ill offices and hostility. The semblance of religion which they preserve, and the exterior decency of their conduct, sustain them, in the mean time, in their error. They may conceive that they are doing God service. Their minds are made up. They have a scheme of doctrine of their own. Their standard is fixed. Their general society and habits, the natural hardness of the human heart, its alienation from the life of God, and the subtle malice of Satan, all conspire to lull them asleep in their dangerous security. The Holy Scriptures are read partially, and without fervent prayer for divine illumination. The offices and services and articles of our pure and apostolical church are wrested from their obvious meaning, and made to do homage to the prejudices of the day. Thus an almost impregnable barrier is thrown around, and *the strong man*

armed, to adopt our Saviour's language, keepeth his palace, and his goods are in peace.

Where the evil does not proceed to this length, the formalist still DENIES PRACTICALLY AND VIRTUALLY, the power of religion, which he may have too much knowledge, or sense of truth, directly to oppose. His life refutes what his tongue may possibly express. He admits perhaps in words the truth and excellency of sincere piety; but the language of his habitual conduct and temper is, 'I will not renounce the pleasures and reputation of the world; I will not receive the humiliating doctrines of the utter inability of man, and of salvation by grace through faith in the death of Christ; I will not be taught and guided by the Holy Spirit; I will not submit myself to the laws of God.' These persons exemplify the practical denial of the real grace of God, and are contented to remain on the low level of merely human virtue. They may be amiable, but they are not religious; they may be sincere, but they are not enlightened; they may be engaging, but they are not spiritual; they may consent to serious statements of religion, but they do not feel them; they may talk, but they do not act; they may be moral and decent, free from licentious irregularities, and distinguished by a worldly moderation and temperance; but they are not holy, spiritual, zealous, and entirely devoted to God.

They are deceiving themselves. They have no sufficient conviction of their sins. They are governed by a prevailing regard to the present life; are proud of their imagined attainments; and God and his supreme claim on their love are forgotten. The salt is without its savour; the lamp without its oil; the scaffolding without a building; the guest without the wedding-garment; the body without a soul. It is not the living Christian, but a picture. It is not David, but an image and pillow of goat's hair. It is not wheat, but chaff; not inward purity, but *the washing of the outside of the cup and platter; the whited sepulchre; a name to live whilst we are dead.*

THE FINAL TENDENCY of this adherence to the mere semblance of piety may be learnt from the statements which introduce the text. *Men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy; without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good; traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.* How terrible a picture; and how calculated to inspire us with a dread of mere formality in religion! It is observable that the enumeration begins with the vice of selfishness and ends with that of sensuality. This may possibly be designed to teach us that

men depart from God by *being lovers of their own selves*; and terminate their apostacy by being *lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God*; whilst the vain appearances and decencies of religion are partly the cause, and partly the effect of both. So that this perilous state of lifeless conformity, trifling as the evil may appear at first, may reduce men at last to nearly the same condition as the unenlightened heathens. The list of their vices, as given us in the first chapter of the Romans, resembles in almost every particular the one we have just recited, and seems to teach us that, if the power of religion be lost, all is lost; and that, whatever be the outward form of piety, the corrupt heart of man will gradually sink to the same abyss of disorder and immorality, from which the genuine doctrines of salvation, and the mighty grace of God attending them, alone can deliver it.

I proceed, then, in applying the subject, to address myself,

I. TO THOSE WHO HAVE TOO MUCH REASON TO FEAR THAT THEY HAVE THE FORM OF GODLINESS WITHOUT THE POWER.

And here I would wish to speak with unfeigned respect and tenderness. I would address you with the most friendly intentions, and in the accents of kindness and affection. I am

far from imputing to you all the vices, which in many instances spring from a state of mind somewhat similar to your own. I am ready to acknowledge all the amiable and prepossessing qualities which may probably adorn your character. I admit the good effects of your moral and religious example on your neighbourhood and dependents. I acknowledge your benevolence to the poor. I grant even that you are sincere in serving God according to your conscience. I will suppose further, that, from your education and circumstances, you may have seldom met with truly religious persons, or, as perhaps you might be inclined to call them, over-religious persons. All this I concede; and every measure of deference and regard which is due to your rank or reputation in society, I most cordially render to you. Nay, I allow further, that the statements which I have been making in this discourse are the statements of a minority in the community, and of a minority which you may have been taught to overlook. But allow me seriously to propose to you this plain question, Have you ever considered, as becomes immortal and accountable creatures, THE ESSENTIAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE FORM AND THE POWER OF CHRISTIANITY? Have you ever thoroughly examined your heart and life as to this obvious and yet fundamental point? You must be aware, from the express language of

the text, as well as from the confessedly corrupt state of many Christian churches, that there is such a thing as retaining the one whilst the other is denied. Have you, then, ever suspected yourselves? Have you considered that the very circumstance of belonging to a pure and reformed national church, may possibly assist to betray you into an error upon this point? Have you ever reflected that there is possibly something higher and more spiritual in religion than you have as yet discovered, something more delightful and elevating, something that engages and fills the heart, something that brings back man to God as a father, something that unites him to the cross of Christ, that separates him from the world, and fixes his whole soul on eternity and heaven?

Read only with a teachable heart the plain language of Holy Scripture. Mark what it states, in every place, of the power of godliness. Open, for instance, the 6th chapter of St. John. All is spiritual and divine. Christ is spoken of as *the bread of life*—His *flesh is the life of the world*—*Except we eat his flesh and drink his blood, we have no life in us*. Now, let me simply ask if you ever experienced any thing of THIS UNION WITH CHRIST BY FAITH? Turn again to the 5th chapter of the 2nd Epistle to the Corinthians. The Apostle there speaks of *the constraining love of Christ*, of our being *new crea-*

tures in him, of our being reconciled to God through Him who was made sin for us. Now, has this solemn transaction of the soul with God, THIS RECONCILIATION, taken place? Has it led you to a supreme love to Christ? Are you new creatures?—Once more, for almost any part of Scripture is sufficient for this purpose, read the 8th chapter to the Romans; reflect on the two states there described—the being in the flesh, and the being in the Spirit—the carnal and the spiritual mind—the indwelling, the leading, the consolation of the Spirit of God, and the minding and following the things of this world. Did this subject ever occupy your thoughts? Can you hope that you are ACTUALLY LED BY THE INFLUENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT?

But I need not press you on these or similar points. You must acknowledge that your religion has never gone so deep as these and other passages of Scripture obviously and necessarily require. You know that you have never prayed with a humble and contrite heart; that you have never sought reconciliation with God by a living faith, nor been justified by the alone righteousness of Christ, nor been born again of the Holy Ghost, nor endeavoured to walk according to the Spirit. Your religion has never changed your heart and broken you off from your secret sins. Your religion has never

brought you in tears to the foot of a Saviour's cross. Your religion has never made you *delight in the law of God after the inner man*. You have a form, and little more than a form, of godliness. You are in fact dead as to spiritual life and feeling. You are, after all, establishing your own righteousness on the ruins of the Cross. You pursue, without pleasure or meaning, a weary and accustomed round of mere external duties and forms.

Awake then from your fatal security. Learn what true and spiritual religion is, and what it must effect in you, if ever you go to heaven. Behold, the penetrating eye of an all-seeing God is fixed upon you! Harken to those awful words, as to a voice of thunder, addressed to the Jews of old, but in their main intention applicable with double force to professed Christians: *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord; I am full of the burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even your solemn meeting.* All mere forms, then, are abominable in the sight of God, if the heart be wanting. What can the mask and

shadow of religion avail with Him? The semblance of justice and benevolence may, indeed, impose on men like yourselves; but it can never for one instant deceive the Most High. Even in this world, what benefit would the notion of life, or healing, or wealth, or deliverance produce? What good would arise from the mere machinery or implements of skill or benevolence? Would they raise the dead, restore the sick, enrich the perishing, or release the prisoner? And much less will the mere form of pardon and grace and purity, change or sanctify the heart. Beseech, then, of God the gift of his Holy Spirit. *Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.* Surrender your heart to God. Never rest contented till the whole power of religion, like a gentle and steady and copious stream, refresh and renew your soul. Renounce your reliance on a heartless semblance of piety which only impedes and postpones your conversion; and embrace, as penitent sinners, the offers of grace made you in the Gospel. Thus shall you be, not only almost, but altogether Christians. You shall no longer *halt between two opinions*, but boldly and fully follow the Lord. And you shall feel all the grace and blessedness of the converted and devoted servants of Christ.

But I address, in the next place,

II. THOSE WHO HAVE NEITHER THE FORM NOR
THE POWER OF GODLINESS.

If persons who wear the external semblance of piety, and yet want its vital efficacy, are in the state which I have described, what must be your danger, who are utterly careless and indifferent, and do not preserve even the decencies of an external religion? If those who have only one part of godliness be in this awful condition, what must be yours, you have no part of it at all? He who has only a form of devotion, says Bishop Hall, is a hypocrite: he who has not even that, is an atheist. And yet in this Christian country how many thousand persons have no pretence to piety, and are not concerned to have any! They live almost as heathens. They have some regard to the laws of the land, the law of honour, the rules of a profession, the orders of trade, and the prescriptions of usage; but as to spiritual religion, the faith of Christ, the public worship of God, family piety, the observance of the Sabbath, purity of conversation, regard for conscience, the moral and religious education of children, self-government, and a preparation for death and eternity—these things never occupy a serious thought. They have not even the form of them: they have nothing to represent them; they are things which lie quite beyond their view. And

yet they call themselves Christians. Let them learn then to be alarmed at such an irrational course of conduct. *Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?* Know ye not that the swearer, the Sabbath-breaker, the unclean person, the proud, the covetous, shall not see the happiness of heaven? Know ye not that godliness is the highest duty of man? Know ye not that you are sinners; that you must repent or perish; that you must believe in the Son of God for everlasting life, or be condemned? Know ye not that you have the power, as well as the form, of godliness to acquire, and only a moment, perhaps, for this difficult acquisition? Know ye not that God will have all the heart, or none; and that the mere general acknowledgment of his being, and a loose adherence to a national church, whilst you have not so much as a decent semblance of piety, will only aggravate your condemnation? In forming our estimate of those who have the form of godliness, and, as we fear, only the form, we may sometimes err; but in our judgment of you who carry on your very forehead your determined negligence, and, perhaps, scorn of all serious religion, we cannot be mistaken. If there be any truth in the Bible, you are in imminent danger of perdition. Consider then your ways; turn to God; resolve earnestly to serve Christ, as you have been

earnestly serving the world. Do not satisfy yourselves with assuming only the name of piety; but begin with the life of it, and this will bring along with it the name. Decide now for heaven; renounce your sins; *yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead. How shall you escape if you neglect so great salvation?*

Allow me, before I conclude, to address,

III. THOSE WHO HAVE BOTH THE FORM AND THE POWER OF GODLINESS. I say those who have both the form and the power, because it ought to be our concern to unite the two. When in a pure Protestant church, we rise from the mere external to the vital and internal part of religion, we are not to neglect the first, but to take care that it be animated and invigorated by the second. In domestic life, principles of obedience without order, will soon lead to inextricable confusion. In the state, patriotism without subordination and subjection to law, will soon become wild and selfish. And thus even in the church of Christ, godliness itself, without proper attention to external form, may quickly be accompanied by irregularity and innovation. Perhaps the temper of the present day inclines us, in some cases, too much to neglect ecclesiastical discipline. Schisms and divisions are less carefully avoided than the Scripture directs

them to be. Let us then, whilst we leave to our brethren of every confession the most entire liberty of conscience, honour and value our own sacred services and our own wise and scriptural system of church polity. Let us be careful to worship the Lord according to them, in *the beauty of holiness*. Let us aim at obtaining a meek, solid, decent, cheerful, and permanent religion. Let us be grateful to God for our scriptural and truly devotional Liturgy; and in using its prayers, confessions, and thanksgivings, let us ever add the POWER of piety to these instructive FORMS. Let us thus endeavour to obey the command of our Saviour, when speaking of the smaller observances of the law, compared with the weightier matters of it, *These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the others undone.*

SERMON X.

CHRISTIAN MEEKNESS AND FORGIVENESS.

COLOSSIANS, III. 12, 13.

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another; if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

It is the peculiarity of the Christian faith that it not only forbids the commission of sin, but enjoins the actual practice of holiness. Other systems may have attempted to frighten men from vice, this alone teaches them to love obedience. Nor is it merely the public and more heroic virtues which it enforces, but the retired and lowly ones also, which were little regarded by the heathen moralists, much as the happiness of mankind depends upon them. Accordingly the Apostle Paul, after he had exhorted the Colossian converts in the verses preceding the text, to mortify those corrupt passions which were, so to speak, the *members of*

the old man; proceeds in the words now read to direct them to cultivate the opposite graces. And in doing this, he proposes, after his usual manner, those peculiarly Christian motives by which alone men can be effectually enabled to perform them. Hence in considering this subject, we must notice,

I. The Christian graces or virtues here enjoined by the Apostle.

II. The Christian motives by which he enforces them.

We begin by reviewing,

I. THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES HERE ENJOINED BY THE APOSTLE.

These are in the whole seven—*bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing of one another, and forgiving of one another*. They may perhaps, however, be reduced to three heads. Bowels of mercies and kindness may be classed under the more general term COMPASSION. Humbleness of mind, meekness, and long-suffering, appear to be all parts or effects of LOWLINESS OF SPIRIT; whilst the forbearing of one another, and the forgiving of one another, may be considered under the topic of FORGIVENESS OF INJURIES. The first class regards our duty to others who are in misery; the second is designed to lead us on to the proximate duties arising from the or-

dinary obligations and infirmities of life; the third carries us forward to a right conduct in respect to persons who are unjust and contumelious. These several graces are said to be *put on*, because, as garments cover and adorn the body, so do holy tempers adorn the soul. Thus in other passages of Scripture we are exhorted to be *clothed with humility*, and to *put on the Lord Jesus Christ*; and in the verses which precede the text Christians are described as *putting off the old man with his deeds, and putting on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him*.

The Apostle begins with enjoining a TENDER COMPASSION for the miseries and wants of others. We are to put on BOWELS OF MERCIES, to cultivate that deep and real sympathy for the calamities of our fellow-creatures which kindles the whole soul and opens and touches the very heart. The expression is common in the Holy Scriptures, and especially in the Old Testament. It denotes, not only the act of relief, but the most tender affection in affording it. The Apostle places this first, because it is from hence that all benevolent actions should flow. The sympathetic commiseration of Christian love is often of itself a greater support to the afflicted than any mere external gift. The objects of this virtue are those who have no helper, as the widow and the orphan; and in general the poor,

the sick, and those who are overwhelmed with any sudden calamity. As often as such are placed in our way, like the wounded traveller in our Lord's parable, we are to have *compassion* on them, and *go and bind up their wounds, pouring in oil and wine*. Apathy and hardness of heart are least of all suitable to a Christian, who owes every thing himself to the compassion and mercy of God, and who is taught to be affected with the evils of those who partake of the same nature with him, since he may himself have need in turn of the like sympathy. We sin, not in having affections, but in using them amiss. He *that hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?* It is no sufficient discharge of this duty to give alms even with profusion: we must *visit the widow and fatherless in their affliction*; we must see for ourselves, as opportunity allows, the case of woe; we must *weep with them that weep*, we must have *compassion one of another*, and *be merciful, even as our Father which is in heaven is merciful*.

The Apostle goes on in our text from the affection to the action—*put on KINDNESS*; for deeds of benevolence must ever be united with *bowels of mercies*. Real compassion does not display itself in the refinement of a fastidious ear, but in the emotions of a feeling heart.

Words of pity without correspondent sympathy and actual relief, where we can afford it, are pretence and mockery. We are to *love, not in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.* The two together constitute the Christian's duty towards the afflicted—a heart prompt to feel, a hand kind to relieve.

The second class of virtues enjoined in the text, are those which arise from our ordinary obligations in life, and the numerous infirmities which attend them. They may be comprehended under **LOWLINESS OF SPIRIT.** The first is **HUMILITY**; for this is the parent of all good actions. Pride is the poison of the soul: it hardens the heart; it is the cause of contention; it is the enemy of all the duties which we owe to others, and is directly opposed to that disposition which bears with their errors and weaknesses. *God resisteth the proud, but he giveth grace unto the humble.* The man who has truly repented of sin and received with deep self-abasement the ineffable *gift of righteousness* in Christ Jesus, will be prepared to *walk humbly*, first with his reconciled God, and then with all around him. Such a penitent has the seed and preparation of all other graces. He considers that if he has in himself any thing good, it proceeds not from his own power, but from the mercy of God; that this good is very little, compared with what he ought to have, and what others

have; that it has been misused in various ways, and is so mingled with sin and infirmity as itself to need the divine forgiveness. A true Christian will therefore never take occasion from his works of charity of being vain and presumptuous; but will conduct himself with humbleness of mind, will *condescend to men of low estate*, will reckon himself to be *unworthy of the least of all God's mercies*, and will be ready, like his Lord, to wash the feet of his fellow-disciples.

Meekness and long-suffering are the daughters of humility. Christian MEEKNESS is not a merely natural softness and tenderness of mind, which commonly errs as much on the side of sinful compliance as other dispositions do on that of severity, but is a supernatural grace which renders a man tractable in his common intercourse with others, which prevents him from being soon exasperated with their follies, or smaller faults, and which moderates anger, so as to repress that which is unjust, and to temper that which is right and lawful. *The meek shall inherit the earth.* Nothing so much tends to make life pleasant and tranquil amidst the little vexations and disappointments which human frailty perpetually occasions even in the best regulated families, as this engaging disposition. For since we do not live with perfect men, but with those who are fallible, and who have very different judgments and tempers, meekness is, as it were, a shield

thrown around us, which blunts or turns aside the shafts of prejudice and unkindness.

To more considerable faults, however, we are to oppose LONG-SUFFERING, which differs from the former grace chiefly as it may seem to regard continued and more harassing infirmities, or even injuries done us by others. Meekness bears with the daily and ordinary mistakes of those around us; long-suffering endures protracted and heavier evils. It is easy, and especially when we are before the eyes of others and have the hope of speedy relief, to meet a short and occasional inconvenience with a Christian temper. But a long and unremitted annoyance, something that crosses our turn of mind or interferes with our plans, that presses hard upon us, that wounds us in the most tender part, that seems to us to be the most grievous and painful occurrence possible; this is often a rigorous trial of religious principle. To exercise long-suffering on such an occasion, to view the hand of God in the permission of it, to pray for the right use of it in extinguishing our undue love of the world and confirming our disposition of submissive obedience to the will of God, is a triumph of divine grace and an indication of a Christian mind.

But the servant of God may at times have to encounter wicked and contumelious persons, and then the preceding principle of lowliness

of spirit must appear in THE FORGIVENESS OF INJURIES, which may be considered as including the spirit of the remaining duties of our text, *forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any.* Where the fault committed against us is not outrageous, we must exercise *forbearance*; where it has proceeded to an open breach, we must endeavour to repair the evil by *forgiveness*.

FORBEARANCE is the act of enduring to the utmost the provocations which we may suffer in word or deed. It appears to relate to troubles and difficulties more considerable and bitter than those which are strictly within the reach of meekness and long-suffering. When we are assailed by such greater injuries, we are not immediately to rise to punish the offender, but we must try in the first instance, to conquer him by lenity, and to bring him back to a reasonable mind by kindness. We must avoid a hasty judgment and an irritated temper. We must *hope all things*. We must show that the offence does not throw us off our guard, and vex and fret our minds; we must proceed to remedial measures, and rather err on the side of delay, than on that of precipitation. *Ye have heard, said our Saviour, that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say unto you, resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him*

the other also. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.

It is, however, possible that our duty to God may forbid our any longer forbearing another; the injury may occasion an open breach of friendship, and we may be reluctantly compelled to appeal to the protecting arm of authority. We are then called to the exercise of FORGIVENESS, *forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any.* More is contained in this than in the former. For a man may possibly bear an injury because he cannot revenge it, or because he judges it to be inexpedient to do so, though the desire of revenge may still rankle in his heart. The Apostle, therefore, commands us, not only to endure injuries, but also to eradicate the very desire of revenge from the mind, to love the offender, and to act towards him as if the fault had never been committed. Lawful methods of obtaining security against malicious persons, and of guarding against their assaults, are, indeed, allowed to us. But the disposition to forget and forgive the provocation, however great, and to testify that forgiveness in every way not inconsistent with other duties, is an indispensable command. We are constantly to pray, *Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.* After delivering

the striking parable of the ten thousand talents and the punishment inflicted on the unrelenting servant, our Lord adds, *So likewise shall my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.*

The expression, *Forgiving one another*, implies that we are all in danger of committing injuries against our neighbour, and that therefore we should exercise that pardon to others which each needs himself by turns: whilst the indefinite statement, *if any man have a quarrel against any*, seems designed to guard against those evasions by which we endeavour to elude the real force of the duty. All is here put universally. *If any man*, whoever he may be, whether a relation or a stranger, a superior or inferior—*have a quarrel*, any cause of complaint on account of an injury done, or supposed to be done, in word or deed—*against any*, in whatever connexion, or under whatever circumstances he may stand. It is impossible to escape these general and comprehensive terms. Forgiveness of injuries is a fundamental grace of the Christian character, from the obligation of which nothing whatever can release us.

Are, then, these things so? Does the statement we have been making describe the temper of a Christian? Must he be tender, meek, forgiving; must he be distinguished by compassion when

he meets with afflictions, by lowliness of spirit, when he is assailed by inconveniencies, and by a readiness to forgive when he suffers injuries ; must he *put on* these lovely virtues and appear clad in them continually ; must he mortify the natural unkindness, pride, and love of revenge which brood in his heart ; and must all this be done habitually and towards all persons ? Then, what motives can be proposed sufficient for such a series of duties ; of duties so opposite to the corrupt bias of his nature ?

This leads me to consider,

II. THE CHRISTIAN MOTIVES BY WHICH THE APOSTLE ENFORCES THESE VIRTUES.

The motives are three : our Christian profession, the love of God, and the forgiving mercy of Christ.

THEIR CHRISTIAN PROFESSION is a motive which the Apostle urges on the Colossians, in the first words of the text, *Put on, THEREFORE*. This has the force of an inference. The Apostle had been speaking of Christians being *risen with Christ*, of their *setting their affection on things above*, of their *being dead*, and their *life being hid with Christ in God*, and of their future *appearing with him in glory*. He had just stated to them that *the wrath of God came on the children of disobedience* for those things in which they had lived before their conversion ;

and had reminded them that they had *put off the old man with his deeds, and had put on the new man, where Christ was all in all.* Hence he draws the conclusion, *Put on, THEREFORE, bowels of mercies.* He thus urges them to *walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they were called,* to act agreeably to the new privileges they enjoyed and the new and heavenly birth they participated. As they had *put on the new man which was renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him,* it became them to put on more and more all the properties of it. Thus only could they prove the sincerity of their Christian profession, and adorn and recommend the doctrine of their Saviour: whilst, if they walked in the lusts of the flesh, and indulged in apathy, selfishness, fretfulness, and revenge, they would appear to be *children of disobedience,* and justly suffer that unutterable punishment which such hypocrisy would deserve.

But besides this general motive, the Apostle insinuates another in the affectionate terms in which he addresses them. He calls them *the elect of God, holy and beloved.* This is to prepare for the exhortation, and is an argument why the particular graces to which it relates are to be exercised. It is drawn from the LOVE OF GOD. This is the bond of obedience; and the three blessings which the terms before us comprehend, as they all refer to divine love, are

powerful inducements and motives to every part of holiness.

For if we can humbly hope that we are **THE ELECT OF GOD**, and that he has *chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world*; to what has he so chosen us, but that we *should be holy and without blame before him in love*? If we, on Scriptural evidences, *know our election of God*; what are those evidences but our *work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope*? If we indulge any trust that we are *elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father*; is it not *through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience*? If we would *make our calling and our election sure*; is it not by *giving all diligence to add unto our faith, virtue, and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness godliness*? *For the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his; and, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ, depart from iniquity.* Those, therefore, who profess a hope of being the *elect of God*, are to be especially and urgently exhorted to the practice of those virtues which are the proofs of that blessing, the effects which it produces, and the suitable and indispensable marks of gratitude to God for it.

This is still more evident by the expressions,

holy and beloved, which are connected with it. These describe the character and the privilege of those whom the Apostle had just named *the elect of God*: they are set apart for his service, and they are blessed with the tokens of his peculiar favour. They are HOLY; being made so by the operations of the Holy Ghost. They are *renewed in the spirit of their minds*. They *yield themselves unto God as alive from the dead, and their members as instruments of righteousness unto God*. They aim at being *holy in all manner of conversation*. They are far from being entirely free from sin, but they are earnestly engaged in *cleansing themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God*. To put on, therefore, the Christian graces of compassion, lowliness of mind, and forgiveness, is a duty which by virtue of their character and their actual state of separation to God, they should feel themselves bound both to remember and to practise.

Nor does the special favour of God by which they are distinguished, less powerfully impel them in the same course. They are BELOVED. God bears a most tender love toward them. *He so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life: God is love*. But this is not all. *For after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards*

man appeared, not by words of righteousness which they had done, but according to his mercy he saved them by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. Behold, then, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on them that they should be called the sons of God! Now surely it behoves them who are beloved, to love God in return: surely they will love him, because he first loved them; and if we love him, we shall keep his commandments; for this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. It becomes, also, those who are beloved to conform themselves to the image of the God who loves them. We are to be followers of God as dear children, and walk in love as Christ also hath loved us. And if the love of God be a powerful motive to every part of Christian practice, there is yet something more appropriate in the Apostle urging from it the particular graces which we have been considering; those tender and meek and forgiving dispositions which are the very impress of God, the mark of his mercy, the fruit and evidence of the compassion we have experienced ourselves, the peculiar duty of such unworthy, frail, sinful, and yet, by divine pity, distinguished and beloved objects of forbearance and grace. Surely if any temper should characterize those who owe every thing to God's love,

and who are still indebted to it daily, it must be some faint imitation of that love in their conduct towards others.

This the Apostle lastly enforces by the consideration of the FORGIVING MERCY OF CHRIST, *Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.* The example of Christ has the force of an argument to persuade, and of a rule to direct. Has Christ freely and graciously forgiven us—forgiven us so many trespasses—forgiven us at a price so inestimable as his own blood—forgiven us with such overflowing affection; and shall we not forgive the comparatively trifling offences of our fellow-creatures? Did he endure the contradiction of sinners, did he bear reproach, did he suffer ignominy, did he agonize in the garden of Gethsemane, and expire on the cross, and all from mere mercy, all in our stead; for our redemption, our pardon, our admission to the divine favour, our rescue, our salvation; and shall we not be compassionate to the wretched, meek to the froward, and forgiving to the injurious?

If we pretend the greatness of the crime committed against us, the difficulty of banishing its recollection from our mind, and the loss of something of our character and interest in society, if we neglect to revenge it—which are among the excuses men commonly frame when they indulge unhallowed passions—what are all

these vain reasonings, when we consider the rule of the Apostle, *EVEN AS Christ forgave you, so also do ye?* What injuries can be great, compared with those which we have done to God? What obstacles to forgiveness so threatening, as the obstacles which seemed to prevent our being pardoned? What sacrifice to be named with the awful and incomprehensible death of the Son of God, when he *was once offered to bear the sins of many?* And yet what forgiveness so gracious, so spontaneous, so rich, so entire, so permanent, so directly flowing from the heart, so pure from all remaining wrath, so imbued and filled with infinite love and compassion, as that act of remission, by which Christ hath forgiven us? He who does not then put on all those lovely graces which begin in sympathy for the miserable, and end in forgiveness to the guilty, has never felt aright in his heart the benefit of Christ pardoning his sin, and has no proof that he possesses this inestimable blessing.

And, indeed, to pass to a brief application of the whole subject, we cannot but learn from what has been said,

I. HOW FAR MEN IN GENERAL ARE FROM BEING TRUE CHRISTIANS.

For if real religion include the feeling of Christian motives and the performing of Chris-

tian duties, then how few comparatively, even in a Christian country, can, by any rule of charity, be considered as servants of God! How few have ever assumed a distinct Christian profession; I mean, a profession, not merely of Christianity, but of those things in which Christianity consists! How few have *risen with Christ*, how few have *set their affections on things above*, how few are *dead to the world*, how few have *put off the old man with his deeds* and have *put on the new man*; how few are sensible, or even profess to be sensible, of the unspeakable love which God bears to his children, and of the infinite mercy of Christ in pardoning sin! Or if there were any doubt of the general deficiency of nominal and external Christians as to these and other points of inward piety, what doubt could remain, if we look to their spirit and conduct? *By their fruits ye shall know them*. What then are the tempers and behaviour of the generality of men? Are they meek, and compassionate, and lowly, and forgiving, or are they not too obviously fierce, and selfish, and obstinate; resentful of the smallest injury, disdainful of submission, proud of superiority, and contemptuous towards others? What mean the family feuds which disgrace our households, what the heart-burnings, what the unnatural divisions and separations, what the interminable quarrels, what

the party-spirit, evil-speakings, and slanders, which prevail among men?

O, let us at least learn from the subject before us, what Christianity is, and what it must effect in us before we can be Christians. Let us begin with seeking the pardon of our sins. This is to be the motive of obedience, and must therefore precede it. *Repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ*, are the beginning of all religion. This will lay the axe to the root of the tree. By repentance the sinner breaks off from transgression; by faith he receives the gift of righteousness, and obtains the benefit of remission. The merits of Jesus Christ being imputed to his account, he is accepted as righteous before God. He who thus receives forgiveness from the hands of his compassionate Saviour, will assuredly begin to love his neighbour as himself. Thus holiness and pardon will be inseparable. The regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, which he has already experienced in its incipient operation, will make him more and more a *new creature*. He will *put off the old man with his deeds*, he will *put on the new man*, and be gradually adorned with all the softer virtues of compassion, meekness, and forgiveness towards those around him. This is Christianity. This is the principle and the practice of religion. This therefore let us seek, imploring of God

his Holy Spirit to give us true repentance, and bestow on us the gift of faith, to forgive us our sins, and to form us to a holy imitation of the unbounded mercy which we receive.

But we may,

II. LEARN HOW MUCH TRUE CHRISTIANS THEMSELVES HAVE TO DO IN ORDER TO ACT UP TO THEIR PROFESSION. The virtues we have been considering are not acquired in a day. A long course of instruction, and perpetual efforts of watchfulness and prayer, are indispensable. Holiness does, indeed, in some degree necessarily follow the true grace of God; but for the growth and promotion of it, there is great need of constant exhortation and vigorous exertion. The Colossians had already put on the new man; but they are commanded in the text still to proceed to cultivate the virtues which we have been reviewing, because they were to grow and increase in them, and to exert and exercise them daily in all the concerns of life. Christian morality must therefore be duly preached and enforced, as well as Christian doctrine, if we would follow the example of St. Paul. The necessity of doing this is evident. For how deficient are we in the holy and lovely graces which our text enjoins! How difficult for us is it even to understand what is meant by them, or to feel the importance and difficulty of cultivat-

ing them, unless they form a part of ministerial instruction! How different would be the aspect of the Church, if its members uniformly, or any thing like uniformly, acted in the spirit of the Apostle's maxims! Let us then examine ourselves strictly on these points! Let us put off more and more the sordid and disgraceful garments of our unrenewed and sinful condition, and let us put on the becoming dress which should adorn the children of God!

And to this end let us enter more deeply into the MOTIVES of Christianity, that, by divine grace, we may employ them more fully to the production of Christian practice! If the doctrine of the love of God and the pardoning grace of Christ be withdrawn or obscured, the foundation is taken from the building, and the edifice will fall. If these doctrines be inculcated without Christian practice, we overthrow the edifice already reared, and leave only the foundation. To unite the two is the Apostolic method. Grow, then, in the view of the Saviour's PARDONING MERCY, that you may be merciful. Imbibe more fully the obligation of your Christian PROFESSION, that you may act agreeably to it. Increase in the LOVE OF God, that you may love others. The mysteries of the divine love, especially in the ELECTION OF GRACE, may be most profitably contemplated by the experienced and obedient

Christian, as our seventeenth Article states, if it be connected with a sober and intent regard to the holy fruits by which alone it is to be known, and with an habitual and well-fixed adherence to the following of that will of God which is plainly revealed in Holy Scripture. The consideration of it will then inflame our love to God, will promote our humility and thankfulness, will inspire us with holy hope of attaining everlasting felicity, will animate us to prepare more and more for it, and will teach us especially, as we find in our text it is intended to do, to put on all those virtuous and lovely tempers, which peculiarly become the children of God; all those graces which honour Christ, all that adorn the Gospel, all that benefit our fellow-creatures, all that prepare us for the peace, purity, and harmony of heaven.

SERMON XI.

THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS.

MATTHEW, XXV. 14—30.

For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one, went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. After a long time, the lord of those servants cometh and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents; behold, I have gained besides them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful

over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents; behold I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed; thou oughtest, therefore, to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take, therefore, the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

THERE are few of our Lord's parables more plain and important than this. The accountability of man for every blessing he receives is a fundamental point in religion; and the statement of it contained in this parable is so express and authoritative, as to demand our most attentive consideration. It was addressed by our Saviour to his disciples in order to correct their false expectation that the kingdom of God would immediately appear, and to direct them to a right use of the various advantages intrusted to them during his personal absence: but it is applicable to the servants of Christ in every age. It appeals at once to the conscience. It exhibits to the world at large a general rule of the moral government of God with his rational and intelligent creatures; whilst it displays especially to the church the order of the divine proceedings in the last awful day of judgment. It is of course very possible, by expounding it without a due reference to other parts of the sacred volume, to pervert the design of this, as well as of many other of our Saviour's parables. But where the primary doctrines of the fall of man, his responsibility, his condemnation by the holy law, redemption by the death and sacrifice of Christ, justification by faith, salvation by grace, the regenerating and sanctifying influences of the Holy Ghost, and the necessity of

holy obedience, are rightly enforced, according to the general scope of Scripture, the instruction of this particular portion of it will be eminently useful. In considering it, there are three parts which seem to demand explanation.

I. The talents intrusted to the management of the servants.

II. The right employment of them by the faithful servants, with their reward.

III. The character and doom of the slothful servant.

We are to notice,

I. THE TALENTS INTRUSTED TO THE MANAGEMENT OF THE SERVANTS.

The man travelling into a far country, who called unto him his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods, represents to us our Lord and Saviour, who is the master and proprietor of his creatures; the absolute owner of all things, and the Lord and Redeemer of his church; and who has left his disciples, as to his visible presence, by his ascension into heaven. The servants to whom the talents were intrusted, represent the professed disciples and members of Christ, the visible body of the faithful; but particularly the ministers and stewards of his mysteries. The command given to them to manage his goods during his journey, teaches us the duty which he has enjoined on Christians,

in the period of their abode on earth, of anticipating his return to judgment, and employing themselves in the administration of his gifts. The talents given to the servants, represent the various powers and blessings which Christ has assigned to us for the salvation of our souls, the benefit of our neighbour, and the glory of his name. These are of various kinds; and to understand rightly the nature of them is the first main point necessary to a correct view of the whole parable.

Under this description of TALENTS may be reckoned all the unnumbered mercies of God, which as rational and moral agents we may convert to a good or a bad purpose: all the faculties of our minds, as well as all the members of our bodies, are like a deposit of money put into our hands to trade with, from which some gain is expected to arise. The understanding and will and imagination and memory and affections, our natural and acquired abilities, our time, our health, our influence, authority, property, privileges, family, offices, and gifts, are all a sacred trust. The duties and opportunities of the young, the middle-aged, and the old; of the sick and the strong; of the learned and the ignorant; of the rich and the poor; of the magistrate and the subject; of the husband and the wife; the parent and the child; the male and the female; are all like talents placed

under the respective management of each person. We are endued with reason. We have the gift of the Holy Scriptures. We have been born in a Protestant land. We have enjoyed the blessings of being initiated by baptism into the Christian church. The influence of the Holy Spirit has been secretly operating on our minds. We have had education, convictions of conscience, and calls and warnings from God in his providence. Thus we have each something committed to us. The knowledge of a Saviour and opportunities of salvation, at least, are a weighty and valuable trust. The ministers of God's holy word especially have received a solemn stewardship in the charge of souls, and in their gifts and qualifications for edifying the church.

The DIFFERENT NUMBER OF THE TALENTS, which is the next important circumstance in the parable, teaches us that the great Head of the church distributes his gifts according to his sovereign pleasure. Some have *five talents* intrusted to them, some *two*, and others *one*. A larger proportion of natural or acquired powers, a wider circle of influence, more numerous occasions of doing good, greater vigour of body or mind, better means of moral or religious instruction, purer and higher examples of piety, greater freedom from snares and temptations, more inviting opportunities of glorifying God,

are granted to one man than to another. The widow with her two mites, and Lazarus lying at a gate full of sores, differed in the amount of talents committed to their care, from the *young man who had great possessions*, or the rich one who *pulled down his barns and built greater*. Saul at the head of a kingdom, and Samuel the judge and prophet of Israel, differed in their gifts from the retired and sorrowful Hannah and Naomi. The seraphic and royal Psalmist, and Solomon whose wisdom filled the earth, had talents different from those intrusted to Ruth and Rahab. Bezaleel and Aholiab, again, *filled with the spirit of wisdom to devise cunning works, to work in gold and silver and in brass*, had not the same endowments or duties with Moses who *saw God face to face*, or Aaron who *put on incense*, and *made an atonement for the people*. The husbandman *plowing all day to sow*, whom his God *doth instruct to discretion and doth teach*, has distinct talents from the Apostle who *had been in the third heavens*, *who spake with tongues and came behind in no gift*, and *who was a chosen vessel to bear his Saviour's name to the Gentiles*. In like manner, Gaius, whose charity blessed the church, and the widows *trusting in God* who were supported by its bounty; Apollos, eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures, and Aquila and Priscilla, who *by their occupation were*

tent-makers; the Ethiopian eunuch in the court of Candace, and Cornelius at the head of his military band; Dorcas, with the coats and garments which clothed the poor, and Peter, who raised her to life with a word, had severally very different measures of gifts: but, perhaps, not more different than we notice continually in the visible church now, where the great Proprietor of all still *doth what he will with his own*.

We are to observe, however, that these talents were given TO EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS SEVERAL ABILITY. This is a point of great moment. There is a perfect wisdom and equity in the divine government. We have the proportion of talents given us which is suited to our intended station in the church or community, and which would suffice, if well employed, to prove us to be faithful and valuable servants. The five talents would be a burden or snare to him who has two; and the one would not adequately engage him who has five. As God has disposed of each of us and adorned us with blessings, so he enjoins us this or that species of work, exercises us in different active duties, raises us to various functions, and supplies the matter, and proposes the occasions of acting well.

We proceed to consider,

II. THE RIGHT MANAGEMENT MADE OF THEIR

TALENTS BY THE FAITHFUL SERVANTS, WITH THEIR REWARD.

He that had received five talents, went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. This teaches us the right use which the humble Christian makes of all his endowments and gifts, and the increase of them which attends it.

The RIGHT USE of the divine blessings is well represented by his trading or occupying with his master's property. This is not to be understood in a way of merit, for *when we have done all, we are unprofitable servants*; and the very first use of the means of religion which God affords us, is to fly by humble faith to the divine Saviour of sinners, for pardon and grace. But the image of trading fitly sets forth the course of active improvement of every gift, which the true Christian pursues, his diligence and industry in his calling, and the common utility which is thereby promoted. Whatever is bestowed upon him, he considers, not as his own, but as his Lord's. He employs it therefore with the scrupulous conscientiousness of a faithful servant. He does not waste his gifts in idleness, abuse them to self-confidence and pride, or lessen and destroy them by rash and ambitious projects. He does not rest with complacency in the barren thought that he possesses them. He does not display

them with ostentation. He does not compare himself with others, or endeavour to ascertain whether his talents are more or less than those of his neighbour. He does not interfere with a province not assigned to him, or hinder the work of his fellow-servants, or require every thing to be done in his own way, or quarrel with those who differ from him in their mode of acting. But he studies to do his Lord's will; he has a delight in the work; he endeavours to extend his obedience to the whole compass of his duty; he shrinks from no trouble or danger; he estimates all he can do, as nothing for such a Master; he aims at approving himself to him, and not to the world; he laments lost opportunities; and walks wisely in the management of his concerns. He begins immediately, proceeds diligently, works contentedly, and perseveres cheerfully.

His concern is to trade with his talents. Whatever will tend to the discharge of his personal and relative duties, whatever will promote the happiness of his family and connexions, whatever will instruct the ignorant, relieve the distressed, assist the needy, guide the inquiring, comfort the sorrowful, reclaim the wandering, and confirm and encourage the sincere, all this, with a due regard to circumstances and in the fear of God, he considers his proper vocation. Whatever use he can make of any circumstances

in which he is placed, any office he holds, any influence he has gained, any knowledge he acquires, any parts or accomplishments which he possesses, any favour God has given him with others, any occasions or incidents which present themselves, he straightway turns to account, even as the merchant traffics with his commodities. Above all, he employs the means of salvation to his own personal benefit. He repents of his sins, and believes in the sacrifice of Christ for pardon and justification before God. He values the Bible, prizes the Sabbath, derives improvement from pious example, profits by divine chastisement, and learns from the mistakes and sins of others; and thus uses every advantage for spiritual instruction with fidelity and thankfulness. If he be a minister of the sanctuary, he considers all his opportunities of saving the souls of men committed to his care, and all his ability for discharging his high office, as a solemn trust deposited with him, and for which he must give account.

The consequence of this right use of his blessings, will be the INCREASE of them. The servant with the five talents, *traded with the same, and made other five talents; and likewise he that had received two, gained other two.* May God assist us in considering this topic! An unbounded field of inquiry and contemplation is here presented to us. It is not only enjoined

upon us, if we would be Christians, to occupy with our gifts, but to multiply them.

The industrious servant of God will do this. The very SKILL AND MANAGEMENT which he gradually acquires in the exercise of his functions and duties, contributes in fact to the increase of them. He learns as he goes on; he gains more experience; he overcomes difficulties. He becomes himself more and more interested in the success of his endeavours. He is at home in his work. Especially, his growing meekness, suavity, and humility, his government of his temper, his knowledge of human nature and the human heart, and his practical judgment in difficult cases, greatly enlarge his capacities of usefulness, whilst they are the natural effects of the persevering pursuit of a favourite object. Need I add, that his more matured acquaintance with the Holy Scripture, his riper knowledge of the doctrines of the Gospel, its promises, its duties, its exhortations, its warnings, its supports, all furnish him with matter of increasing success? He not only does more than when he first began, but he does things better, he comes more directly to the point, and mingles less of injudicious or misplaced endeavours in seeking to attain his grand object.

To this are to be added the INVENTIONS, if I may so speak, of a diligent and faithful Chris-

tian. He contrives to do more good continually. His mind being engaged ardently on his great trust, becomes fertile in expedients. He does not rest contented with the ordinary plans of others, but enters on undiscovered ground, and marks out new regions of usefulness. He does not merely yield to applications when they are made to him, and just satisfy the decent expectations of his circle of society, but he is a volunteer in every righteous and holy design. He devises every thing he can, looks all around him for occasions of doing good to others, and getting good himself, of learning or teaching, acting or enduring for God and his neighbour. I need not say, that the opportunities which will arise to such a man, are in fact innumerable.

We are to consider also THE GROWING INFLUENCE over others which his solid excellence acquires for him. Perhaps in no way does the faithful steward gain more in his traffic than in this. By his manner of life he disarms prejudice, and becomes better known in his connexions : his motives are ascertained, his designs understood, his wisdom and piety admitted. Past experience of his consistent and friendly character speaks for him. The secret authority of beneficence and uprightness upon the consciences of men spreads around. The great importance of this silent but powerful auxiliary

makes it by degrees a valuable additional talent. Like a commander well known to his troops, his example and spirit fill those about him with confidence, and make him capable of the most difficult undertakings.

Then the COMMUNICATION OF FURTHER GIFTS, and of opportunities for the use of them from God, together with the blessing which more and more rests on his endeavours and renders them effectual, increase the goods and talents of the diligent Christian. As he proceeds with an ardent thirst to glorify his Master and a watchfulness which seizes all favourable events, God is pleased in his providence to answer his prayers and reward his honest diligence. Surprising turns of circumstances occur. Unexpected direction and success are given to his weak and hesitating attempts. Difficulties apparently insuperable sink away. Aid is afforded in exigencies. Scenes of usefulness unfold themselves. God prepares the hearts of men with whom he is connected, prospers his pious and active endeavours to glorify him amongst them, and grants an happy issue to his various projects for doing good.

It is not easy to determine TO WHAT EXTENT the talents of the good servant may be multiplied by these means. I require not a perfect union of all the dispositions and circumstances which have been mentioned; for in this world

the best characters are defective. Nor do I speak of a perceptible and open transition from one step in this progress to another. Much less am I to be understood of hasty measures, the fruit of self-will under the garb of zeal. The busy, conceited, and presumptuous man, who neglects his immediate, or more difficult duties, to fly to distant and splendid scenes of action, is not the patient and industrious steward before us. But the gradual and quiet tenour of the faithful servant, who begins with primary and humble duties, and proceeds, as his opportunities are increased, in his holy course, preserving still all the extent and all the sweetness of a willing and well-ordered obedience, it is delightful to contemplate. It is difficult to say whether such a man may arrive at last; how his means and powers may be augmented; how his influence may expand; how his very name may be blessed. Consider only the private Christian in his domestic circle, who should for forty or more years pursue such a course. Contemplate a person of elevated birth or distinguished station in the community who should thus act in the conduct of his public, as well as personal, duties. View the sacred instructor in religion proceeding onward with similar dispositions and activity, in a quiet and steady path of pious actions. Take even the humblest class of society, and suppose such a series of

efforts to be made there. The mind is quite lost in attempting to estimate the amount of good which may be achieved. There is no station in society where a faithful Christian may not succeed in this way in honouring God and promoting the benefit of man in a degree almost beyond calculation.

And shall any such want their REWARD? In this world, indeed, they may possibly be opposed and misrepresented. But at length the *Lord of his servants will come and reckon with them.* Then he who has discharged his duty with fidelity will have *boldness in the day of judgment* and a *humble confidence towards God.* He will say, not with pride and self-dependence, for after all he is a sinful creature, indebted for every thing to divine grace, but still with cheerful gratitude, *Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents, behold I have gained besides them five talents more. And his Lord will say unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.* Or if he has been faithful only in the management of two talents, he will make a similar report, and receive a like commendation and reward. It is not the number of our gifts, but the diligent use of them, to which our Master will have regard. O blissful consummation! O gracious recompense! O

exhilarating plaudit! *Well done, good and faithful servant.* Let us be careful not to lose this praise by seeking the praise of men. And how ample the recompense! How undeserved! For the very few things in which he has been faithful, he is made *ruler over many things.* Surely this far surpasses the value of the work achieved. This represents a state of bliss and transport greatly exceeding the previous labour. It is explained by the following words, *Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord:* that joy which he purchased by his death and passion, which he possesses himself in infinite and unclouded glory, which he communicates of his rich bounty to all his servants.

But it is time for us to review the painful, but instructive, part of the subject which remains for our consideration, viz.

III. THE CHARACTER AND DOOM OF THE SLOTHFUL SERVANT.

He that had received one talent went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. Such is the description of the negligent Christian professor, who neither employs nor increases the gifts and blessings intrusted to him; who neither saves himself, nor benefits those connected with him. He is said to have had only one talent, which teaches us that God will require an account of the smallest trust, as well

as of the greatest ; and likewise that those who have the least to perform for God, often neglect even that little. This one talent is designed to signify a confined circle of opportunities, limited degrees of health, ability, knowledge, time or influence. It applies to persons in the ordinary and humbler stations of life, not called to great and public duties, not placed in conspicuous and commanding stations, not intrusted with abundant wealth, numerous dependents, and unusual advantages. As these persons are beyond all comparison the larger proportion of mankind, this part of the parable is the more interesting. It embraces also the minister of religion who has a smaller measure of gifts, and a narrow and retired course of duties.

The fault of this servant was SLOTH. *He went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.* He might have used the knowledge of his Bible and the blessings of the Sabbath, and the public and private worship of God, at least to his own salvation ; but this he neglected to do. He might have honoured God in his calling, however obscure ; but he omitted it. He might have benefited others by a holy example, submissive temper, and diligent activity ; but to these he never attended. He might have counselled or reclaimed a neighbour, comforted the distressed, and discountenanced the profane : of all this he thought nothing. He might have

instructed and blessed his family and children : but this was a labour to him. He might have spared something from his earnings by frugality and management, for the relief of a poorer fellow-creature ; he might have watched for occasions of doing little kindnesses ; he might have redeemed his time ; he might have improved his knowledge and judgment of religious and moral duties ; he might have prayed for the church and the world—but he was too indolent for such exertions. If he was an instructor of others, he might have saved his own soul, and those intrusted to his care ; but he neglected both.

It is to be observed here, that SLOTH IS OF ITSELF A CRIME in a servant of God. This was sufficient to condemn the unfaithful steward. It is not said that he wasted his lord's goods, but that he buried them. It is not said that he was profligate, but that he was idle. It is not said that he opposed and despised the work of others, but that he omitted his own. He might be virtuous in the eye of men, but he was thoughtless in the esteem of God. He might be amiable, but he was unprofitable. He gained nothing by trading. He considered it enough not to commit positive vice. He was decent, specious, temporizing, feeble, inert. Men think they live an innocent life in avoiding gross enormities, and in spending their time tranquilly and softly in inactivity. But it is a great evil

not to do good. It is an abuse of the gifts of God not to employ them. Repose is a crime in him who is called to a laborious life. To live to ourselves is to live to sin. A negative character is an unfaithful one.

This appears further in the EXCUSE which the slothful servant is described as making: *Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee, that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed; and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth; lo, there thou hast that is thine.* It is a strange blindness to imagine we can justify ourselves by accusing God of injustice. But self-love and a corrupt heart are capable of any deceit. The multitudes who live a decent worldly life without repentance, faith in the merits of Christ, or any serious religion, and who never once think of making a right employment of their talents, commonly fall into this fatal wickedness. They flatter themselves that they do what they can. They persuade themselves that God is unjust in requiring so much from them. They say, *The way of the Lord is not equal. The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.* They frame to themselves a character of God according to their own fancy. Sometimes he is all mercy, and this invites them to presumption and impeni-

tence. Sometimes he is all justice, and this deters them from any effort. Whilst humility and love to their Master animate the faithful servants to begin in the first place with their own duty, and trust their Lord's kindness and mercy; pride and indolence dispose the slothful ones to begin with vain reasonings on God's supposed designs, and in this way to provoke him to his face.

Thus the *foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord.* He yields to servile fear; he views God secretly as an enemy; he abuses the little he knows of religious truth; he takes up parts of the Gospel, and *wrests them to his own destruction.* He says, if he had the opportunities of others, he would act, but that it is of no use for him to attempt any thing. He says he has tried, and cannot serve Christ. He says he cannot turn to God of himself, and so he must wait till God gives him his grace. He profanely dares, first to imagine to himself what are God's secret purposes, and then to oppose them to his express commands and revealed will. Endless are the mazes in which indolence loses itself. Men may not avow such sentiments as these, nor frame them into a positive creed, but their conduct speaks too plainly for them. *They condemn God, for they say in their hearts, Thou God wilt not require it.*

To all such presumptuous reasonings, THE REPLY of the Lord to the indolent servant is addressed: *Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed; thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.* All the vain pleas of nominal and hypocritical Christians will be silenced at the day of judgment. *Out of their own mouths they will be judged.* God does not deign to argue; he confounds. If, indeed, as they pretend, they formed such a severe notion of the divine character, why did they not act as reasonable creatures on the supposition? Why did they not employ the talent which they confess was intrusted to them? Why did they not pray and read the Scriptures? Why did not they examine into the whole of that revelation which they professed to believe, but believed only to abuse? Why did they not strive with redoubled eagerness to enter in at the gate which they knew to be so strait? Why did they not make every sacrifice, resort to every assistance, call in every helper in a case so urgent and so extreme? Was idleness the way to meet an austere master with acceptance? Was neglect of what they had received the way to obtain further grace? Was disobedience to a plain command the best method of disarming an ex-

traordinary severity? Was burying the talent in the earth the safest and most profitable way of preparing to account for it?

But all such excuses in fact mean nothing. They are the mere inventions of a wicked heart. They will only serve for the sinner's greater condemnation. Whatever reasonings he may resort to, if those reasonings practically lead him to indolence and sloth as to his salvation and the glorifying of God, they will be themselves the arguments and confirmation of his sentence. Nothing will remain to shield him from the divine wrath. *Take, therefore, the talent from him, will his Lord say, and give it unto him that hath ten talents; for unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* This will be the end of the unprofitable Christian. Stripped of what he seemeth to have, he will be separated from God and happiness, and reap the awful reward of his indolence and wickedness. To the marriage-banquet he will not be admitted. He will be excluded from the joy and from the presence of his Lord. Outer darkness will be his portion, and interminable misery his doom.

I. Let us, then, in conclusion, first use this subject in a way of CONVICTION OF SIN.

For how many, we have reason to fear, are slothful servants! How many are practically inert with respect to God and their salvation, absolutely dead as to spiritual religion and active improvement of their talents! If we are to consider all those to be unfaithful, who, with a profession of Christianity, and the opportunities of knowing and obeying the Gospel, are yet living a sensual unprofitable life, uninterested about their own souls and the souls of others; careful concerning this world, thoughtless about another; *labouring for the meat which perisheth*, neglecting that which *endureth to everlasting life*; valuing highly their superiority over others, and all their advantages, so far as they think it will reflect honour on themselves, but depreciating them when reminded of the account they shall have to give; yielding to every prejudice against religion, every threat of the world, every apprehension of reproach, where God and the souls of men are concerned, and overcoming all these when their own ease or gratification is at stake—if all these persons, together with the numerous classes of men who, in different ways, do not increase their gifts nor rightly use them—are in fact *wicked and slothful servants*, and in danger of being *cast into outer darkness, where is weeping and*

gnashing of teeth; then surely men ought to be awakened and aroused; then surely we must endeavour to shake them from their slumbers, to point out to them the guilt of indolence and inactivity, to press on them the obligations under which they lie, to tell them that their goods are not their own but their Lord's; to admonish them that the higher they are in station, rank, influence, talent, opportunity, the more they have to account for; to warn them of the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of the human heart; to caution them against the vain palliations which such a heart will devise to cover an idle and unholy life; to tell them how near they are to death and judgment; to remind them that the excuses and presumption of the slothful servant will not for one instant suspend his doom.

O allow me to draw aside the veil of time, and place before you the very tribunal of God. Mark, sinner, the awful glories of the Judge! The assembled world stands before him! Every secret of every heart is disclosed—You tremble—Your pleas already fail you—A mortal coldness seizes you—*You call on the rocks and mountains to hide you from the wrath of Him that sitteth on the throne.* All the incidents of your life rush upon your distracted mind. Every advantage for religion is now a source of terror. The talents of which you once boasted, the

rank with which you were so flattered, the courtesy and number of your dependents, now are as so many daggers in your heart. The vain-glory is gone; the responsibility remains. The whole guilt of stifling conscience, neglecting means of religion, refusing the Saviour, doing despite to the Spirit of grace, avoiding duty, proposing a bad example to others, omitting occasions of doing or obtaining good, now fill your agonizing memory. In the mean time, the Judge demands the account. His eye darts through your soul. Already your sentence is about to pass his lips. You ask, what you shall do? You demand in agony if the final sentence is absolutely pronounced—A whisper of mercy says, No—there is yet a moment for salvation—The fearful words are not yet uttered—fly—fly to the mercy of the Judge—The tribunal is not yet closed; there is yet hope—There is yet forgiveness in the blood of Christ.—Infinite grace is offered you. O listen to the heavenly accents. Lay hold of the hope set before you. Confess your past unprofitableness. Implore pardon and acceptance with God through the atonement of his Son. Then shall your past sins be blotted out. This will be the first step towards your becoming a faithful servant. Repentance for sin, and faith in a dying Saviour, are the turning points. Thus, saved by the divine mercy, you shall enter with feeling

and love and gratitude, on a new and sincere course of obedience to God. You shall depend for strength on the grace of the Holy Spirit. You shall begin a holy life. Your character shall be changed. You shall henceforth employ all your Master's goods to his glory; and shall, instead of the curse which was just about to be pronounced, receive at length the gracious and delightful commendation of your Lord.

II. But we may use the whole subject in a way of INSTRUCTION to the true servant of God.

Let Christians generally learn to be HUMBLE UNDER THE SENSE OF THEIR DEFECTS, in every part of their weighty duty, as stewards of the Lord's talents. Pride and self-flattery, if they steal upon the mind, mar every thing. Be lowly in heart; rely, and rely only, on the sacrifice of the death of Christ for pardon; honour the Holy Ghost in his work: dread temptation: remember how little you have as yet done, and how much is before you. Distrust yourselves. Let your frame of mind be contrite, teachable, simple. Let your efforts be patient and meek. Repose at last all your trust in the divine mercy and grace.

But in the next place, let those of us who have but few talents, BE CONTENT WITH THE STATION IN WHICH GOD HAS PLACED US. Bless

God that he calls some, and qualifies them for difficult and arduous and elevated duties; but be content with your own. You have little reason to envy those above you. We are sometimes tempted to look up to the great and learned and powerful with too much admiration. But O, who can estimate their danger! Who can anticipate the account they must render at last! Who can tell how tremendous their responsibility! God, indeed, can give his faithful servants grace to use even five talents so as to gain five talents more; and this is an encouragement to those who are placed in such elevated, and therefore perilous, circumstances; but let each of us be satisfied with our own measure of gifts, and occupy with them till our Lord comes.

Again, be DILIGENT AND ZEALOUS IN THIS DUTY. Let not the prevalence of bad and indolent examples repress your ardour. Men of this world never condemn a steward for being too faithful and industrious; and yet if any of the servants of our heavenly Lord labour to improve their talents, they begin to exclaim against them as extravagant. But it is a *small matter to be judged of man's judgment*. Let the slothful represent you as hypocrites or enthusiasts, it is enough for you if the Judge of all esteem you good and faithful. His plaudit will outweigh a thousand obloquies. *Stir up, then, the gifts of*

God which are in you. Be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.

Lastly, let the ACCOUNT YOU WILL HAVE TO RENDER TO YOUR LORD BE EVER PRESENT TO YOUR MIND. Nothing will more tend to preserve your fidelity than the constant impression of the nearness and solemnity of your final reckoning. The responsibility of man lies at the foundation of all religion. Whatever difficulties may at times arise in your minds in reconciling this with some parts of the doctrine of the divine grace in the Gospel, let not this circumstance disturb your belief of it. If you can remove such difficulties by other considerations, well; if not, they must be over-ruled. If any thing is clear in the Bible, it is that *every one of us must give an account of himself to God.* Be not then deceived by apparent, and only apparent, contradictions. There is no practical difficulty to a humble Christian; whilst the slothful and wicked man will turn the plainest truths to his own destruction. God will *reward every one according to his works.* *They that have done good shall rise to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation.* Let this profoundly solemn reflection temper your joy and hope in believing. Especially, if you are a steward of the myste-

ries of God, rejoice with trembling. Glory only in the cross of Christ on the one hand, and occupy with your talents in preaching and living according to the doctrine of that cross, on the other. *Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning. And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord, when he will return from the wedding. Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. But if that servant say in his heart, My Lord delayeth his coming, and shall begin to beat the men-servants and maidens, and to eat and drink and be drunken; the Lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.*

SERMON XII.

YOUNG PERSONS ENCOURAGED TO DECISION
IN RELIGION.

RUTH, I. 15—17.

And she said, Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people and unto her gods; return thou after thy sister-in-law. And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.

THERE is scarcely any narrative in the Holy Scriptures more interesting than that of Ruth. It is like a piece of fine painting, abounding in the most natural and exquisite touches. It affords a specimen of the gracious dealings of God with his church; and especially tends to encourage young persons in resolutely choosing the ways of piety. The character of Ruth, the

circumstances of her conversion to the faith of Israel, and the subsequent events of her life, are all full of instruction. The whole exhibits the loveliness of true religion, and is calculated to inspire us with a holy courage in following it. With this impression I shall endeavour to offer some remarks on her history, in the hope that, under the blessing of God, it may animate young persons especially to take a decided part “in professing the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully fighting under his banners against the world, the flesh, and the devil*.”

In considering, then, the holy resolution recorded in the text, let us notice,

I. Those steps of the providence of God which led Ruth to the knowledge of religion.

II. The effects of his grace apparent in her pious determination to follow Naomi to the land of Israel.

III. The evidences of his faithfulness which appeared in her subsequent history.

Thus the providence of God, the grace of God, and the faithfulness of God, as exemplified in this affecting narrative, will be the chief objects of our contemplation in this discourse.

I. Ruth was by birth a Gentile, a Moabitess; *an alien from the commonwealth of Israel,*

* Baptismal Service.

a stranger from the covenant of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. But the providence of God, concurring with his grace, led her in a very remarkable manner to the knowledge of the true religion, and made her a fellow-citizen with the saints and of the household of God.

The first step towards this result was THE FAMINE IN ISRAEL, which induced Elimelech, with his wife Naomi, and his two sons, Ephraim and Manasse of Bethlehem Judah, to go to sojourn in the country of Moab, the land where Ruth was born and in which she dwelt. This removal may seem to be a somewhat dubious measure; for temporary difficulties ought not to make us easily throw ourselves into situations, in which we cannot enjoy the benefit of the means of religion and of the society of God's church and people. In the famine itself, however, both the judgment and the mercy of God were apparent. *A fruitful land made he barren, doubtless, for the wickedness of them that dwelt therein;* and yet by such a visitation many particular designs of grace towards individuals, as in the case we are to consider, were probably accomplished.

In Moab, Elimelech died, and his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, no longer restrained by his authority, united themselves in marriage with women of Moab, contrary to the command

of God, who expressly forbade the Israelites contracting marriages with the idolatrous nations around them, and who especially declared that *a Moabite should not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the Lord for ever.* Thus Elimelech appears to have contributed to the sins of his children by removing them from the service of God and the society of his worshippers. He went to Moab to avoid famine; but probably without taking counsel of the Lord. Such projects seldom succeed even in this world. And what was the result in this instance? He himself finds death were he thought to obtain the means of prolonging life: he leaves his family unprotected; and his sons connect themselves in forbidden affinity with the heathens.

It pleased God, in accomplishing his purposes of mercy towards Ruth, that she SHOULD BE ONE OF THE TWO WOMEN OF MOAB, WHOM THE SONS OF ELIMELECH MARRIED. Thus she became united to the family of an Israelite, and had the opportunity of learning the revealed will of God. This marriage, sinful as it was on the part of her husband, was to her the first step of salvation. How inexplicable is the mystery of the divine counsels! By circumstances unlawful in themselves, and for which the agents who commit them, are justly punish-

ed, God, in sovereign wisdom and mercy, sometimes accomplishes purposes of grace towards an individual sinner. This issue of an overruling providence did not at all lessen the sin of Elimelech, in going to Moab, supposing that determination to have been sinful; or the undoubted crime of his sons in marrying heathen women. God's revealed will should be our rule, and our only rule of duty. What good he may incidentally educe from the guilt and disorder of our passions, is quite above human calculation, and does not at all alter our obligations or accountableness. This is a principle which cannot be too strongly impressed on the mind. It runs through the whole system of the divine government. The secret purposes of God cannot be the rule or measure of man's obedience; nor, when they are manifested, can they be pleaded in excuse for his transgressions. The unjust treatment of Joseph, the treason of Judas, and the crucifixion of Christ, were not the less criminal, so far as the actors were concerned, because God in his inscrutable mercy accomplished the preservation of Egypt by the first, and the redemption of the world by the two last of those events. The same may be said of God's inflictions of punishment by sinful agents. The rebellion of Absalom, for example, was not the less abominable, because by means of it God punished

the sins of David. Thus may we adore the providence of the Almighty in bringing Ruth into a connexion with his people, though under circumstances, as in the case of the conversion of Onesimus, in themselves improper and criminal, and such as a God of infinite holiness could not, without blasphemy, be said to approve, even while he overruled them for purposes of grace and mercy.

THE DEATH OF MAHLON AND CHILION followed; by which Ruth was deprived of her husband, and Naomi of her sons. What a picture of human life does the case of Naomi present! First the famine falls heavily upon her, then the death of her husband, then the marriage of her sons to idolaters, and lastly their death. When affliction enters a family, it is not often satisfied with a single victim. Separation, parting, solitude, death, too often follow each other in rapid and melancholy succession.

Thus bereaved and desolate, Naomi, hearing that God had visited his people in giving them bread, RESOLVED TO RETURN UNTO THE LAND OF JUDAH. When we perceive the world failing us, mouldering away before our eyes, presenting us with an universal blank, we should then, if not before, think of returning to God. Rebukes in providence are intended to teach us the vanity of the world; they call upon us to *come out*

from the company of sinners, and be separate. Thus Jacob was admonished by afflictions to go up to Bethel; Jonah was brought back to God by punishments; and Job was humbled by his calamities. What a blessing is it, for God to deprive us of our earthly comforts, in order to quicken our languid piety and to bring us into closer union with himself!

Naomi had, by this time, GAINED THE CONFIDENCE OF RUTH. The humble servants of God usually do far more good in their private walk than forward and loquacious professors of religion. The name, NAOMI, was probably descriptive of her cheerful and winning piety*. She had studied to commend her religion to her daughters-in-law, and to be a blessing to her family. When therefore she determined to go back to Israel, her widowed daughters were disposed to accompany her. The providence of God was thus silently and unsuspectedly leading Ruth to become a proselyte to the true faith.

We may notice ARRANGEMENTS OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE EQUALLY REMARKABLE in some other instances of conversion recorded in Holy Scripture. The events in the history of Rahab; the coincidences in the case of the woman of Samaria; the conversion of Zaccheus; the meeting of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, of

* The Hebrew word, Naomi, signifies *pleasant*.

Paul and Onesimus, and of the same Apostle and the Philippian jailor, are of this nature. But the instance of Lydia deserves particular notice. St. Paul was at Troas in Asia Minor; but being *forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia*, he was called by a vision into Europe. Coming to Philippi, he went out of the city on the sabbath *by a river-side, where prayer was wont to be made; and sat down and spake unto the women which resorted thither*. Amongst these a certain woman, not of Philippi, but of the city of Thyatira, heard him, *whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul*. What a concurrence of events, trifling in themselves, and apparently accidental, and yet, in the unsearchable wisdom of God (whatever might be their other effects), all working together to the conversion of this one individual person!

Now, though it is not always possible to retrace our conversion to such predisposing arrangements of Providence, and though, were it possible, it may not be always necessary to do so; yet, generally speaking, the humble Christian will look back, as in every thing, so particularly in this greatest event of his life, with adoration and gratitude, to the tenour of God's dispensation towards him. He will remember the persons whom he met, the books he read, the sermons he heard, the journeys he took, the afflic-

tions by which he was visited, the unexpected and apparently accidental combination of circumstances which took place, all contributing eventually to his salvation. If any thing criminal as to the agents themselves was perpetrated, he will in no respect excuse or lessen its guilt; and if any part of his own conduct was blameworthy, he will be deeply and unfeignedly contrite for it before God. But he will not the less acknowledge and bless the infinite *riches of God's goodnees and forbearance and long-suffering*, which, notwithstanding the wickedness and perverseness of man, led him, by methods unthought of and inexplicable, to true repentance and conversion.

But it is time for us now to consider,

II. THE EFFECTS OF DIVINE GRACE APPARENT IN RUTH'S PIOUS DETERMINATION TO FOLLOW NAOMI TO THE LAND OF ISRAEL.

There had very probably, before this resolution was uttered, been a GRADUAL WORK OF PIETY going on in the mind of Ruth. Naomi had evidently won her regard; for goodness is attractive; and thus Naomi's affection for her daughters-in-law, her patience under trials, her integrity, meekness, and kindness, and her attention to their temporal comfort, had probably rendered Ruth more disposed to receive with good-will her endeavours to instruct her in the

knowledge of God. But it was God himself who alone could thus bless the prudence and piety of Naomi to the softening of the youthful mind of Ruth, the removing of her prejudices, and implanting in it something of the fear of the Lord; and consequently the resolution which this young person expressed, must be considered as the result of this previous divine and efficacious teaching.

There was also apparent in her determination a COMPASSION FOR NAOMI in her destitute circumstances. Ruth's affectionate mind could not endure a final separation. She could not leave her mother-in-law to return to Judah alone, stripped of her husband and sons, and without any earthly solace in her bitterness. Religion is a distinct thing, indeed, from natural affection, but is often, by divine mercy, observed to spring from it. Many a child has been led to Christ and heaven by the united emotions of natural feeling and supernatural grace. Naomi's generous wish that Ruth would stay in Moab and consult her temporal peace and settlement, would increase her desire to compassionate and comfort her. Nothing is lost even in this world by a disinterested ingenuous spirit. We must not make religion a pretext for gaining our own ends, but fairly state the inconveniences which may attend it, and leave others to judge what they should do. Filial

love and a secret principle of piety will decide in the right manner. The loss also of her own husband, would conspire to soften Ruth's mind, and dispose her to leave the land which would remind her of her affliction.

Her KNOWLEDGE, however, AND LOVE OF THE TRUE GOD was, most probably, her chief motive in resolving to follow Naomi. This might indeed be inferred from the whole of her history, but it is especially evident from the expressions, *Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.* She had doubtless heard from her husband and from her mother-in-law of the Lord God of Israel, of his promise to Abraham and his seed, of the redemption of the people by the hand of Moses, of the deeds and conquests of Joshua, of the miracles performed by the divine power, and the worship ordained by the divine mercy. She probably had not much distinct acquaintance, when she made this pious resolution, with the promise of the future Messiah, or with the designs of the instituted sacrifices. She might not have heard much of that *seed of the woman*, whose *day Abraham saw and was glad*, or have a high degree of that faith by which the same patriarch *believed God, so that it was counted to him for righteousness.* But, like Rahab, she knew enough even then to lead her to renounce her idols, to choose the service of the true God, and to take her portion with the

chosen people of Jehovah. Whatever might be the degree of her faith, it was doubtless the same in kind as that by which *the elders obtained a good report*, by which Abel presented his offering, and *Enoch pleased God*, and Noah became *an heir of the righteousness which is by faith*. Doubtless she knew that she was a sinner, that as such she must be saved by the mercy of God; and that this mercy was revealed to the nation of Israel through a future Saviour. It was this knowledge which inspired her resolution, and gave that resolution its chief excellence. Had her conduct been the effect of mere natural affection, it would of course have been no proof of piety towards God; but now she speaks and acts as one *who saw the promises afar off, and was persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed she was a stranger and a pilgrim upon earth, and declared plainly that she sought a country*.

The effect of divine grace is also apparent in her EFFECTUALLY RESISTING THE INFLUENCE OF HER SISTER'S EXAMPLE. Orpah set out to accompany Naomi, as well as Ruth, and both went on their journey for a time. Both also heard the friendly and candid statements of their mother, and both wept and said, *Surely we will return with thee unto thy people*. Both listened again to the longer remonstrance of Naomi, who, like Joshua, would inform them of

the worst ; and both again lifted up their voice and wept. Then it was that Ruth's piety as well as affection, was put to the trial, and then it was that the difference between the power of natural affection and of the true grace of God in enabling us to forsake the world, most forcibly appeared. *Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clave unto her.* The one is easily entreated to stay in Moab ; for the heart, if not constrained by a new and heavenly principle, soon reverts to the world and ease ; but the other, touched by a divine power, can withstand every opposition. Accordingly, the resolution of Ruth is only strengthened by the additional entreaty, *Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people and unto her gods ; return thou after thy sister-in-law.*

How many persons, young persons especially, are seduced from the way of truth by similar arguments ! They go a certain length in religion ; but a sister, a brother, a friend, turns them back again. Nothing is more dangerous than implicitly to listen, in matters of conscience and salvation, to those whom we love and wish to please ; but whose kindness, and entreaties, and tears, are employed to seduce our hearts from the service of God. This one thing does more to cool and damp pious resolutions, than all the reasonings in the world. But if we are really determined for the Lord, let us, like Ruth,

be only the more fixed in our resolution by the desertion of others! Let us ask ourselves, *What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* Let us listen to our Lord's solemn declaration, *He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. He that saveth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake, the same shall save it.*

Mark then the ENERGY AND WARMTH OF RUTH'S RESOLUTION, when thus assailed by the example of Orpah on the one hand, and the arguments of Naomi on the other. There is scarcely an instance in the whole Scripture of firmness and decision on a trying occasion more triumphant than this. And when we consider the age and sex of Ruth, her birth and early habits, her tenderness of character, the modesty and diffidence which appeared in all her future history, and the small advantages of a religious nature which she had enjoyed, we must stand surprised at the power of divine grace in her. Her language denotes the most fixed determination united with the deepest feeling. *Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and*

more also, if aught but death part thee and me. She was prepared for all events and difficulties—*whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge.* The import of her language seems to be, “I know not whither thou art going, I am unacquainted with the land of Judah and the way to it. I know not what provision thou mayst have even for thy lodging during the journey; but still I am resolved to follow thee through all. I know the true God is revealed in the nation of Israel. I know the people to which thou belongest are the real servants of the one Jehovah. I know I can be happy only as I obtain his pardon for my sins, and his favour and mercy in my future life. I accordingly cheerfully quit my native home and people and gods, to choose the people and worship of the Lord God of Israel. And, therefore, *entreat me not to leave thee or to return from following after thee.—Be not against me**; act not so unkind and unfriendly a part. Spare me the pain of the conflict. Whatever may unhappily be the conduct of my sister, I am resolved never to quit thee. And if death meet me on the journey, I am prepared to undergo it; *where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried.* I desire not to lie even in the grave with my native people. I am prepared to renounce them, both in life and in death, and to

* This is the marginal reading.

choose the God revealed in covenant to Abraham and made known by Moses, as my eternal portion. This is my fixed purpose; yea, *God do so to me and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.* I appeal by a solemn asseveration to that God who trieth the hearts, for the unalterable determination which I have made to abide with thee."

What a lovely picture of true grace! This is indeed *to follow the Lord fully*; this is *to choose the good part*; this is *to put the hand to the plough and not to look back.* This is, like Abraham, *to go out not knowing whither she went.* This is, like Rahab, *to be on the Lord's side.* This is, like Matthew, and Zaccheus, and Paul, to follow at once the voice of Christ. Ruth evidently acted from fixed sentiments and ardent love. She manifested the true principles of the fear of God. She cheerfully ventured on his truth, and boldly followed the call of duty; she renounced earth for heaven, time for eternity, the ease of this world for the glories of another. She showed also a holy taste as well as a right principle. There was an emotion, an attraction, a life, an energy in her piety. It was not a cold deduction of reason, but a warm dictate of feeling, not a timid and reserved and hesitating approbation, but a fervent and resolute choice. The root of it was deeply in-fixed. It was not merely a summer-flower, but

a winter-plant that could stand the effects of blast and storm. Ruth acted as one who felt herself a sinner, who needed the mercy of God, who believed this was only to be obtained in his church, who felt this to be dearer to her than life itself, and who therefore risked every thing in pursuing it. And this resolution was taken at a very important juncture. Had she accompanied Orpah to Moab, she might probably have returned to idols and have perished in her sin. A moment of vacillation might have endangered her soul. As if conscious of this, the timid fearful female, of whom no other instance of particular firmness is recorded, rising to the full height of the critical emergency, determines with the solemnity of an oath, and the deeply-seated emotions of unalterable affection, to follow God.

Such is the way to heaven, when conflicting and difficult occasions arise. A half-hearted character will do nothing in religion, for God demands the whole soul. A divine nature gives a heavenly bias. He that feels deeply the value of eternity, a sense of sin, a desire of pardon, the grace and glory of the Saviour, and the necessity of salvation, must be decided in trying circumstances. To *halt between two opinions*, is scarcely less dangerous than to choose the wrong one. A *double-minded man is unstable in all his ways*. He that would have the

evidence of Ruth's piety must adopt her courageous determination.

But we proceed to consider,

III. THE MARKS OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS
WHICH APPEARED IN HER SUBSEQUENT HISTORY.

She ventured, as we have seen, on the truth of God, and *put her trust under the covert of his wings*. Nor did she rely upon him in vain. She found him, as all who imitate her example will find him, infinitely better to her than her expectations. She had left her country and her kindred, and had accompanied an aged and sorrowful widow to a distant land. And was she confounded? Did her hope make her ashamed? Does her subsequent story tend to discourage the humble penitent from imitating her intrepidity? On the contrary, where is there a character more distinguished by the mercies of that God who thus brought her to himself?

I need not dwell, in proof of this, on the peace of conscience which would necessarily follow her pious and noble choice, on the growing acquaintance she would acquire with the will of God, and especially on the light which would break in upon her mind from a knowledge of the promise first made in the garden of Eden to fallen man, and then confirmed to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob—the promise of that glorious *Shiloh*, that *star out of Israel*,

that *angel the Redeemer*, that *prophet like unto Moses*, of which she probably knew little when she first came into Judah, but which was afterwards undoubtedly more fully explained to her. I need not remark the joy she would feel in the remission of sins through the blood of the typical sacrifices, which she would be taught to rely upon, as directing her faith to the future Messiah. I need not point out the communications of God's holy Spirit, which had doubtless already formed her to so magnanimous a resolution, and which would continue to purify her heart, and unite her more closely to that God whom she had chosen as her portion. I do not dwell on these blessings, both because they are common to all the faithful, and because they are not particularly mentioned in the history before us.

It will be sufficient briefly to notice those peculiar marks of the divine goodness to her which the sacred writer especially records.

Observe, then, the CALM AND CHEERFUL COURSE OF PIETY AND INDUSTRY which she pursued. She went out to glean in the harvest, in order to support by her diligence her parent and herself. Her meek and dutiful character was so well known, that the servant who was set over the reapers was acquainted with her as *the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi*. Her whole history marks the peaceful and religious tenour of her life with her mother-

in-law, and the blessing of God which rested upon her.

Notice again the providence of God which LED HER WHILE GLEANING TO THE FIELD OF BOAZ, her near kinsman. It was possibly her amiable modesty which first attracted his notice; and, when he had informed himself of her history, he directed his reapers *to let fall some handfulls on purpose for her*. His address to her was very affecting: *It hath been fully showed me all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thy husband, and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given to thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wing thou art come to trust.*

The further mercy of God which led to HER MARRIAGE WITH BOAZ is also observable. God dwells with the humble. Ruth, who renounced the prospects of settlement in her own land, in order to choose the service of the God of Israel, is now united happily with a kinsman, who appears from his whole conduct to have been a man of distinguished piety; and who was capable by his wealth of rescuing her and Naomi from the poverty which they had long patiently endured.

Nor are we to forget the joy which filled

the pious and tender breast of her mother-in-law when RUTH BARE A SON. A more lovely family scene can scarcely be imagined than that which the mercy of God permitted the pious Ruth to behold, when *the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel. And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age; for thy daughter-in-law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath borne him. And Naomi took the child and laid it in her bosom and became nurse unto it.* What a recompense even in this life did godliness bring along with it!

There is still, however, another mark of the mercy of God exemplified in this narrative; for from Ruth, *according to the flesh*, CHRIST CAME, *who is over all God blessed for ever.* Surely when we consider this, we must stand astonished at the divine benignity and grace.

Review then for an instant the whole interesting case. A Moabitish idolater is first brought to the knowledge of a family of Bethlehem Judah, is then gradually formed by almighty grace to resolve firmly, under the most trying circumstances, to choose the people and service of the true God, is united in marriage with a sincerely religious kinsman, and is lastly honoured with a place in the genealogy

of the Lord of life and glory—this presents a picture of the faithfulness, as well as of the grace of God, which surely cannot fail of being encouraging to those who are seeking him. All Ruth's expectations were surpassed. The truth of the promises on which she ventured, never failed her. She is brought into the most unexpected and happy circumstances in this world; she has also a hope of eternal salvation in another; and all generations call her blessed as giving birth to the near ancestor of David, and through him to the Messiah himself.—In the mean time, of Orpah we know nothing, except that she *returned to her people and to her gods*. Her name occurs not afterwards in the Sacred Volume. She *enjoyed*, perhaps, *the pleasures of sin for a season*; but, so far as we can know, she lived and died in alienation from that God, with whom she must have had, from the family of Elimelech, some favourable opportunities of becoming truly acquainted.

In conclusion, then, I would,

I. ADDRESS THE YOUNG WHO ARE AS YET UNDECIDED IN RELIGION. Let me simply ask them if they would not prefer the character and end of Ruth to that of her sister-in-law? If they would not choose the holy determination, the firm attachment to God, the enlightened zeal and decision of the one, before the hesitat-

ing, partial, and worldly conduct of the other? And yet how many, with far greater advantages than Ruth, follow the conduct of Orpah! They may have some esteem for pious relatives, but they have no marked and firm piety themselves; they may have tender feelings as to natural things, but they have no resolution as to heavenly ones; they may set out, as it were, towards the land of Israel, and endure some difficulties, and weep at some affecting circumstances, and seem to promise well for a time; but they at last return again to *their people and to their gods*. Some great obstacle arises, some persecution because of the word, some persuasion on the part of affectionate friends; and then they doubt, they hesitate, they trifle, they yield—they perish.

What, then, is wanting in such characters? They want that secret but most important difference which distinguished Ruth from Orpah; they want a heavenly taste, a deep conviction of sin, a thorough sense of their need of a Redeemer, and a new birth by the grace of the Holy Spirit. They want DECISION IN RELIGION. This, this is the great defect. Irresolute persons, as an old writer expresses it, are as a door half opened, which invites the tempter; whilst those who have a firm resolution shut and bolt the door, and force him to flee. O that young persons would consider this! How lamentable is it

for us to part from sisters and friends, because we will not accompany them to heaven! How distressing that, when those who live with us and love us are seeking a better country, we should be left behind! Unstable, hesitating young people! too long have *you halted between two opinions*. Stop now and determine for God. Come at length to a decision. *Choose ye this day whom ye will serve*. Be on the Lord's side. Come out at once from the world. Resolve to take your lot with the church. Go with the people of God; follow them, love them, associate with them, live with them, die with them. Let nothing part you from them. Especially engage yourselves by the vows of the holy Sacrament to be the servants of Christ. Receive his atonement; adore his love; glory in his cross; implore the sanctifying grace of his Holy Spirit. Never be satisfied till you have Ruth's persevering piety, that you may have Ruth's God and Ruth's salvation.

II. LET ME ENCOURAGE THOSE WHO WISH TO BE DECIDED IN RELIGION TO TAKE THE RESOLUTION RECORDED IN THE TEXT. You cannot be under greater difficulties than Ruth was; you cannot have more seducing entreaties to withstand; you cannot have less distinct knowledge of religion to guide you. And yet Ruth, a Gentile, under an obscure economy, and at one of the most gloomy periods of that dispen-

sation, affords you a bright pattern of success. You have advantages by far greater than she had. You have the full revelation of God's will; you live in a Christian country; you are protected by the social usages and laws of a Protestant nation; you have ministers and friends to direct you; you have the Bible in your hand. You have the blaze of divine glory in the revelation of Jesus Christ. You have been roused from time to time by the providence of God; you have felt the convictions of his Spirit. Neglect not then the opportunity for securing heaven. Are you weak or vacillating or timorous? Be encouraged. The grace of God will *work in you to will and to do*; the truth and faithfulness of God will be your *shield and exceeding great reward*. Consider also the happy consequences of being decidedly the people of God. The difficulty is in taking a determined step and breaking through the first hinderances to a devout life. Act then resolutely in the strength of almighty grace. You will bless God all your future life for enabling you to do so. You cannot, indeed, expect the same temporal blessings which followed the pious Ruth, because you live under another dispensation; but you may rely even on these, so far as they are for your ultimate good. Possibly your greatest difficulties may soon disappear, when you have once taken an open and firm

part. Possibly the very sister or brother, the effect of whose regard in drawing you back to the world, you most dread, may be won over to your Saviour. The very circumstances which now most perplex you, may be changed, the clouds disperse, and the day break out again with all its splendour. Or, at all events, whatever may be the case as to these outward trials, you will assuredly have pardon, reconciliation, and acceptance with God through the death and righteousness of the Redeemer; you will have the indwelling and communion of the Holy Spirit; you will have the comfort of the promises; the peace and consolation of hope; the testimony of a good conscience; and at last, after the short trials of this life, an eternal rest in the bosom of your Saviour for ever. O the infinite recompense which awaits the resolute and determined Christian! O the unbounded grace and faithfulness of God! O the wisdom of *choosing that good part which shall never be taken from you!* None ever complained of God as a rigorous master. He does *exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think.*

III. LET ME EXHORT THOSE WHO, LIKE RUTH, HAVE CHOSEN THIS GOOD PART, TO IMITATE HER IN THEIR HABITUAL TEMPER AND CONVERSATION. Let their industry, their obedience, their submission, their humility, their simplicity, their thankfulness, their consist-

ency testify the inward principle of grace by which they are governed. Let their religion be a lovely thing. Let it be productive of amiable tempers and affections. Let an undaunted resolution on points of real moment, be united with softness, tenderness, humility, and courtesy of demeanour on points of less importance. Let there be ever a desire to yield and conciliate, rather than to wound charity and peace by useless and never-ending contentions. This is the genuine fruit of grace. This, this greatly recommends religion in young persons. This distinguishes real principle from self-will and pride. This peculiarly adorns the Gospel of Christ.

IV. LET ME ANIMATE PARENTS AND HEADS OF FAMILIES TO BRING UP THEIR CHILDREN FOR THE SERVICE OF GOD. They may be afflicted and bereaved. They may be compelled to leave house and country and friends : but, wherever they are, or whatever be their lot, let Naomi's example lead them to become a blessing in their households. Let them submit to the dispensations of a Providence which is as kind as it is unerring. Let nothing tempt them to worldly expedients, even in times of trouble. If distressing events take place without any wilful negligence on their part, let them wait for God's appearance for them. Even the most unjust persecutors can only *do whatsoever God's hand and counsel have*

determined before to be done. The most gloomy and calamitous circumstances may be pregnant with blessings. Their pious labours may win over a prejudiced relative, may sooth an irritated opponent, may gain, and even save, an enemy. The omnipotent grace of God can convert the most obstinate characters, and can arm the wavering with courage for the day of trial. And what a recompense is this for all the solicitude of pious parents! Who would not pass through Naomi's troubles to share her joy in the conversion of her daughter-in-law, and to partake of the calm serenity of her closing days? Yes, if parental duties are of all obligations the most difficult, they are also the most delightful. If these were more attended to, we should have happier families, and should behold more young people, like Ruth, determined for Christ and heaven. And then, what delight would fill the devout parents' hearts! What gratitude to God would expand their bosoms! An union would be formed in families, not merely such as Ruth vowed with Naomi, which *nothing but death should part*, but which even the grave itself will only cement and perfect, which will stretch beyond *the valley of the shadow of death*, be continued through endless ages, and constitute in no small degree the ineffable bliss of heaven.

SERMON XIII.

PRAYER.

ROMANS, VIII. 26.

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities ; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought : but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

THERE is no duty of the Christian life more important than prayer. It is by prayer that true religion begins in our hearts, that all evil is averted, and that every real blessing is attained. It is by prayer that we draw nigh to God, that we approach a Saviour, that we receive the graces of the Holy Ghost. Prayer strengthens us and enables us to love our neighbour, and to keep the divine commandments ; and from it we obtain support and consolation under the innumerable trials and temptations of this probationary state. It must be a matter, then, of great moment not only to pray, but to know how to pray aright : for, as so much depends on this duty, grace and help to pray must in fact

be immediately connected with all the blessings which we require for our bodies and for our souls. If only we be assisted to pray with spirituality of mind and importunity of affection, all is gained ; for God gives every thing, even heaven itself, to prayer. The encouraging declaration, then, of the Apostle in my text, deserves our most attentive consideration.

We shall endeavour to explain,

I. The Christian's infirmities in prayer.

II. That assistance of the Holy Spirit by which he is relieved under them.

We notice,

I. THE CHRISTIAN'S INFIRMITIES IN PRAYER.

PRAYER is the offering up our desires to God for the blessings we need. It is, then, the expression of the heart ; the pouring out the soul to God, the lifting up the mind, and the drawing nigh to him in holy affection. It includes invocation or calling on the name of the Lord, adoration of his perfections, humble confession of our sins, the imploring of his grace, the pleading of his promises, the dedicating of ourselves to his service, the praising of him for the blessings which he has bestowed on us, and the ascribing of glory and power and dominion to him only.

Prayer is our INDISPENSABLE DUTY. The proofs of this are various. We all are sinners,

and need mercy and salvation. We are also rational and accountable creatures, and have the invitations of the Gospel proposed to us. We have the mediation of the Son of God to encourage our approach. God deserves our gratitude and praise. Our necessities perpetually require his aid. We must perish, if we call not on God. We are also expressly commanded, to *pray without ceasing; to continue in prayer; to pray always with all prayer and supplication; to pray and not faint; to be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication to make our requests known unto God.* These directions, connected with numerous other passages of Scripture, make it obvious that solemn prayer in the church, and in our families, together with earnest supplications in private, are the bounden duty of every Christian. The obligation of public prayer has never been doubted. Nor can that of family devotion be for a moment called in question by those who feel duly impressed with the holy examples of Abraham, Joshua, and David, or who understand the extent and spirit of all the injunctions of the word of God that may be applied to this subject. As to private prayer, our Lord's express words are, *Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee*

openly. No man, therefore, can be a true Christian without the habitual practice of secret devotion, and an attendance, where he has the opportunity, on the public worship of Almighty God. Nor, I conceive, can any head of a family be a sincere and well-informed servant of Christ without superadding his constant prayers with his own household.

OUR INFIRMITIES IN PRAYER are many. The word infirmities here used is emphatical. It properly means diseases or sicknesses; for the corrupt state of our nature has debilitated and weakened all our spiritual powers. Even after receiving the grace of Christ and partaking of the inspiration of his Spirit, we still remain greatly disordered, and suffer much from the agency of this latent contagion, though some of the more noxious effects of it have been healed. Our moral frame is neither sound nor vigorous; and we are subject to relapses and vicissitudes in our spiritual health. These infirmities, though apparent in all we do, are yet most of all evident in prayer. The reason is obvious; for this duty places us immediately before God: it tries the whole state and temper of our souls; and it admits of little external help. It is an effort of principles and feelings which have been divinely implanted; and hence it is the most opposite to the fallen heart of a sinner, which is by nature

alienated from God, and flies from all communion with him.

IN PUBLIC AND FAMILY DEVOTION these infirmities tend to prevent that fixed and holy address of the soul to God which alone constitutes prayer. The words of the minister, or the parent, or master, may be highly spiritual and appropriate (and in our Liturgical services this is eminently the case); and yet our thoughts may wander, our affections be cold, our hearts remain barren and worldly. In the confession of sin, how difficult is it to conform in spirit to the words of humiliation as they are uttered, and to prostrate our souls before God in deep self-abasement! In the offering of praise, how rarely is the heart elevated with the church or the family, to a due tone of humble and sincere gratitude for the divine mercies of which we are so entirely unworthy! In presenting our supplications for future blessings, how seldom do we accompany the language of the minister or head of the household, with correspondent fervour of affection! What Christian is not sensible of coldness, languor, inertness, and infirmity in the duties of every sabbath, and in his attendance on family worship! How often may he detect himself wandering in thought from the subject by which he ought to be occupied! And at the close of the performance, what occasion has he to bewail that malady of his soul

which has depressed him so much in all his efforts to rise towards God and attain communion with him.

But it is to SECRET PRAYER that we must more particularly direct our remarks, because it is here that our infirmities are most apparent, and because what may be said with respect to it, will apply for the most part to public and family devotion. Our failings, then, in private supplications regard either the MATTER or the MANNER of them. *We know not what to pray for, and we know not how to pray as we ought.*

So far as the MATTER of our supplications is concerned, *we know not what to pray for.* Such is our ignorance of ourselves and of the things which are really good for us, that we need the illumination of the Holy Spirit to show us what we should implore of God. By nature we are utterly blind as to religion; and even when we are converted, and pardoned, and devoted to the service of Christ, our infirmities are so many, that we require the unremitting aid of divine grace. Can Jacob, though so pious a servant of God, be supposed to have known what to pray for, when he exclaimed of some of the merciful appointments of God, *All these things are against me?* Did Rebekah know what to ask for, when she said, *Give me children, or else I die?* Did Job, when he cursed his day? Did Moses, when he *spake unadvisedly with his*

lips ? Did David, when he almost envied the prosperity of the wicked : or Elijah, when he fled from Jezebel, and *requested for himself that he might die ?* Or the Israelites, when they *murmured in their tents ?* Or Jonah, when he *fled from the presence of the Lord ?* What, again, did the mother of Zebedee's children know of the right object of prayer, when she besought our Lord *that they might sit, the one on his right hand and the other on his left, in his kingdom ?* How ignorant was Peter, when he would have dissuaded our Saviour from suffering ! And the disciples, when they would have called down fire from heaven to consume the city of the Samaritans !

And how exactly do our infirmities resemble theirs ! We know not what blessings even in PROVIDENCE we should ask of God. The divine promises and commands ought to be the guide of our supplications ; but our own will is too often suffered to take their place. Our eternal good should be our chief concern, even in prayers for temporal mercies ; but how rarely and faintly is this object pursued ! Every thing around us, as well as the express declarations of Holy Scripture, instruct us that all below is *vanity and vexation of spirit* ; and yet we eagerly crave and continually supplicate earthly prosperity. Afflictions are perpetually exhibited in the Bible as necessary chastisements inflicted by

our heavenly Father ; but we pray passionately and unreservedly against them. The remote tendency of events is utterly unknown to us ; and yet we implore particular results of some favourite object of pursuit, as though no doubt hung over them. We are taught to live by faith, but we pray according to the impressions of sense and passion. And after all our past disappointments, we are sure, if we trust to ourselves, to pray amiss the next emergency which arises.

And if we thus err in seeking the gifts of Providence, how much more are we likely to err in seeking those of GRACE ! Spiritual religion is altogether strange to us, except as the mercy of God has enlightened and taught us ; and our weaknesses and mistakes in prayer will be proportioned to this ignorance. We know, indeed, generally by the instruction of the Scriptures, that we ought to pray for repentance, for the pardon of sin, for peace of conscience, for consolation, for all things needful for growth in holiness of heart and life, for victory over sin and temptation, and for the continued influences of the blessed Spirit of God. But such is our depravity and hardness of heart, that we frequently seem as if we were ignorant of all these subjects. Our perceptions are blinded ; our minds a blank ; our thoughts distracted. We forget all particulars. We have no apprehen-

sion of the number of our wants. We find few petitions to offer; and a cursory and hurried devotion satisfies us.

And yet the materials and topics for prayer to be derived from Holy Scripture and the observation of our own several cases and circumstances, are inexhaustible. The extension of the work of grace, the increase of our spiritual attainments, the more exact fulfilment of our duties, the love of our adorable Master, growth in every Christian temper, the improvement of our talents, the instruction to be derived from the dispensations of God, are all subjects which might present us with copious topics of fervent supplication. The eminent examples of the patriarchs and other servants of God, as recorded in Holy Writ, might also furnish us with large materials of prayer. The more complete knowledge of ourselves would, again, open an exuberant source of holy desires. Meditation also on the character, and offices, and love of Christ; on the person and work of the Spirit; on the state of our families and neighbourhood, of the church of God, of our country, and of the world; on the great scheme of salvation, the love of God, the mysteries of his will, the covenant of grace, the witness of the Holy Ghost, and the order and design of the different parts of revealed religion; and on the unnumbered injunctions, promises, threatenings, cautions, and

encouragements of Holy Scripture, would supply abundant topics for prayer. The various patterns and forms of devotion adapted to different circumstances, which are contained in the book of Psalms and other parts of Scripture, would likewise assist our devotions. From these various sources the Christian might always derive abundant matter for prayer; and yet how often is he ignorant of what he should pray for! How weak is his memory! How confused are his perceptions! How difficult does he find it to employ these materials, though spread before him in the Scripture, according to the interchanging scene of his duties and trials! Nothing is so difficult as to bring God and his own heart together.

Besides our infirmities, however, as they relate to the matter of our prayers, we have infirmities also which regard the MANNER OF THEM — *we know not how to pray* AS WE OUGHT. We ought to pray with the most solemn reverence and awe, as though in the immediate presence of God; but, alas, how prone are we to indulge a light and careless spirit! We ought to pray with holy fervour and importunity, as Jacob who wrestled with God, or the widow who supplicated the unjust judge, or the Syrophœnician woman who cried after our Lord; but how tame and lifeless at times are our devotions! We ought to pray with a deeply humble and contrite

heart, as the royal Psalmist, or Jacob, or Daniel, or the lowly publican in the parable; but with how much of secret pride and self-consequence are we apt to approach God! We ought to pray with an entire resignation to the will of God, and humble faith in his promises; with a holy sincerity and uprightness of soul, with an ardent hunger for spiritual blessings, and a simple reliance on the mediation of our Saviour: but O, how often does a repining, unbelieving, insincere, cold, and selfish spirit steal upon us! How quickly do our hearts wander from God! How weak are our best prayers, and how polluted our most sacred offerings! How poor, how miserable, how impotent! We seem at times to want every thing, we are able to ask for nothing, we do not even know, and are unworthy to know, how and what we ought to pray for.

Such are some of those infirmities in prayer, of which the Christian alone is conscious; and which, notwithstanding his efforts and his watchfulness, from time to time surprise and afflict him. For, small as all these defects may appear in the eyes of others, they are the subject of his deep and daily self-abasement before God; and on account of them he *abhors himself, and repents in dust and ashes*. Nothing more decidedly and painfully reveals to him the total depravity of his nature, than the imper-

fection of those secret and retired duties. These, were it not for that depravity, would be the most easy and delightful of all duties : but they now seem to collect and draw to themselves, as the weaker parts of the human frame, the infirmities of every other. This depravity pursues him through them all, and too often converts what ought to be the occasion of his pleasure and gratitude, into the scenes of his conflict and discomfiture.

Let us then proceed to consider,

II. THE ASSISTANCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT BY WHICH THE CHRISTIAN IS RELIEVED UNDER THESE INFIRMITIES.

The blessed Spirit of God affords us the aid which our weakness requires. If we were left to ourselves, we should entirely fail ; but by his powerful help we are enabled to resist our corrupt affections, and to persevere in imperfect indeed, but humble and sincere prayer.

We are accordingly directed in the Holy Scriptures to this Divine Agent as to the great subject of promise in the New Testament dispensation, which is therefore called, by way of eminence, *The ministration of the Spirit*. We are commanded to *pray in the Holy Ghost*. We are said to have *access by the Spirit unto the Father*. We are to *pray always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit*. It is this eternal

Spirit who helps and supports us, as a nurse bears in her arms the tender and feeble infant.

The word rendered, *help*, in the text is one of peculiar strength. It implies that the Spirit takes upon himself a large part of the burden by which our infirmity is weighed down, and not only succours us in a slight degree, but effectually relieves us by dividing, as it were, the burden with us. The image is taken from one who sets his shoulder to another's, and lifts with him at the same load. Let this consideration then encourage us! What, if it is not said in Scripture that we shall be wholly delivered in this world from our moral sicknesses; is it not much that we are effectually assisted under them? Shall we despair, whilst we have such an helper?

The image here employed may also teach us that we are not to relax our exertions, whilst looking for the gracious aid of the Spirit, but rather to increase them. The idea of 'help,' seems to imply that we are ourselves making all possible efforts, and that, whilst making them, the Spirit relieves us under our infirmities. It is true indeed, that all which is good in us is the fruit of the preventing grace of God; but it appears to be intimated in the expression before us, that, in the ordinary course of our duty in prayer, we are to put forth and stir up to the utmost the grace of God which is in us, in dependence on this almighty aid.

The particular manner in which this help is afforded is by the Spirit MAKING INTERCESSION FOR US, that is, so sanctifying our affections and exciting our desires, that we are enabled to pour out our minds to God in fervent effectual intercession and prayer. This seems to be the meaning of the term *Intercession* in this place, as it is obviously explanatory of the previous general expression of *helping our infirmities*, and stands opposed to our *not knowing what to pray for as we ought*; and as it is connected with those unutterable desires in prayer which the text proceeds to describe.

The intercession of the Spirit, then, is not to be understood of his acting the part of a mediator between God and man on our account, before the throne of the Majesty on high, but of his relieving our infirmities, as the Illuminator and Comforter of the faithful, in our religious addresses and duties. Christ is the only Mediator and Advocate with the Father; the Spirit is our Sanctifier and the assister of our weaknesses here. The office of Christ is immediately before the throne of God, the agency of the Spirit is more directly with the church. The intercession of Christ is without us, that of the Holy Ghost is within us. The intercession of Christ is meritorious, the intercession of the Spirit is gracious and supporting. Christ intercedes, and the Spirit is given; the Holy Ghost intercedes, and we implore the benefits of the

Saviour's death. By the intercession of Christ all the obstacles to our salvation are removed, as they respect our offended God; by the intercession of the Spirit all the difficulties are taken away which arise from our own frail and corrupt hearts. Christ pleads above, the Spirit pleads below. By the one we are taught to pray, by the other our prayers are accepted. Accordingly the Holy Ghost was of old promised as a *Spirit of grace and of supplications*: and, *because we are sons*, God is said to have *sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying*, (or as it is in the 8th chapter of the Romans, *whereby we cry*), *Abba, Father*. Gal. iv. 6. This last expression will precisely explain the term Intercession before us: for, as by the blessed Spirit crying in our hearts, *Abba, Father*, is obviously meant his enabling us so to cry; in like manner his making intercession for us, is designed to describe his enabling us to intercede and pray for ourselves.

The aid which we derive from this gracious assistance of the Holy Spirit will further appear, if we attend to the last words of our text, *WITH GROANINGS WHICH CANNOT BE UTTERED*. These groanings—these heart-felt supplications—are the effect of the gracious movement of the divine Spirit on our hearts. Ardent importunity and fervent desires in prayer are the fruit of his intercession. There would appear to be

a reference in these words, to what the Apostle had just before spoken of *the whole creation groaning and travailing in pain together for deliverance* *. In this earnest longing the true Christian largely partakes. *Ourselves also*, adds the Apostle, *which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body*. And in this, the Spirit itself *helpeth our infirmities*, making intercession for us with groanings not to be uttered, filling us with desires and pantings of the whole soul after God, which no words can adequately express.

Sin has disordered all the creation. A curse mingles with every pleasure; the irrational creatures are subjected to vanity; and the uncon-

* The whole passage is very remarkable—so remarkable, that the full and satisfactory explanation of it has hitherto presented a difficulty to the greatest Divines. *For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope; because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.* Rom. viii. 19—23.

verted mass of mankind may be said to wait, as it were, with piteous and touching misery, for the *manifestation of the sons of God*. But Christians especially, who have an actual and spiritual sense of all the evil around them, who see the full malignity and mischief of sin, and who have already some pledge and earnest of the future deliverance, labour as in strong pangs to accelerate the promised rescue; and, when thus employed, the Holy Spirit prompts their desires and intercedes for them by those sighs and breathings which he excites after the redemption to which he seals them, and for the enjoyment of which they therefore long with intense faith and fervency*.

These unutterable groanings will be better understood, if we consider the general state of difficulty and conflict in which the Christian, in consequence of sin, is involved. For, what are all the infirmities of the sincere Christian, what are all his defects in prayer, what all his trials in this earthly tabernacle, but the effect of that general state of ruin into which man's sin has plunged both himself, and the whole creation, so to speak, with which he stands connected? The aid therefore of the blessed Spirit is seen chiefly in the humble but fervent expression of these painful feelings. The Chris-

* See Whitby in loc.

tian in this world is in a state of conflict. Every thing combines to make his devotions partake largely of the language of depression and grief. He has to contend with the corruption of a desperately wicked heart; he has to resist the temptations to unbelief and despair which Satan presents; he has to keep under his body and bring it into subjection. Besides this, he has to perform the duties of his station, to ascend in affection to God, to walk in the love of Christ, to exercise faith in an unseen world, and to aim in all things at the divine glory. He has further to bear with the infirmities of others, to witness the disorder which sin has brought into families and neighbourhoods and kingdoms, to behold the contempt that is put upon the astonishing remedy provided for fallen men in Christ Jesus, and to see his fellow-sinners rush into eternity with heedless and desperate determination. Then his own conscious feebleness and mistakes, his sense of indwelling sin, his shame and confusion for his small proficiency in the ways of God and duty—all these topics, connected with the thoughts of heaven and of his Saviour's presence there, make him *groan being burdened, not for that he would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.*

And when the Holy Spirit is pleased especially to help his weaknesses in prayer and in-

tercede for him, so that he knows what to pray for, and how to pray with somewhat of right affections, he expresses his *desire to depart and be with Christ* in fervent aspirations which God only can fully understand. Then, with the importunity of the man in our Lord's parable who begged the three loaves, he perseveres in his earnest suit. Then, like the royal Prophet, he *follows hard after God*. Then, like Jacob, he says with holy boldness, *I will not let thee go except thou bless me*.

These impassioned sighs and expectations are utterly unknown to the irreligious world; nor can they be fully explained in words. They are regarded however by God who searcheth the heart. A man must be *born from above* before he can attain any just conceptions of prayer in general, and much less of these mysterious breathings of the devout penitent. They are not the fruit of impatience or self-will; but they are the humble and yet eager feelings of a soul *which breaketh out for the very fervent desire which it hath always unto God's judgments*. They do not flow forth so much in copious and fluent expressions, as in broken sentences and detached ejaculations, which imply more than we can find terms to utter. They may not even be framed into words, but conveyed to heaven in the sighs and throbs of a contrite heart. And the penitent is perhaps

ashamed at the incoherence of his devotions, at the very time that the all-seeing God accepts and answers them.

Thus the Holy Ghost relieves and helps the true Christian. He thus supports him under his burdens. He thus assists him in the most important duty of prayer. He thus teaches him what is the right matter, and what the due manner of supplication. And the humble Christian pouring out all his desires before God, confessing unto him all his sins, adoring his perfections, pleading his promises, dedicating himself to his service, and longing for the fruition of his salvation, is kept in humility and faith, in watchfulness and dependence, in holiness and joy; and is at length brought by the mercy of God to that full redemption both of body and soul, after which he has so long and perseveringly sighed.

Before we close this subject, it may be proper,

I. TO MEET THE DIFFICULTY WHICH IT MAY OCCASION TO A TREMBLING CHRISTIAN.

There are, perhaps, many who may be ready to despond under the idea that they have never reached the heights of devotion which have been above described. They have been strangers to these unutterable groanings; and they fear, therefore, that they are strangers also to prayer

and to the intercession of the Holy Spirit. You must observe, then, that there are various degrees in Christian attainments, and that you may be truly devout, though you have not yet advanced so far as to understand the full meaning of some parts of our subject. If you are indeed repenting of your sins, believing in Christ Jesus, and obeying the commandments of God, be encouraged to go forward. Already the Holy Spirit must have aided you in your infirmities, or you could not thus have sought and found his grace.

But you are further distressed because you conceive the language of the text to imply some sensible influences of grace, some illapses of the Spirit, some positive and distinct impressions which you have never felt. There cannot be a greater mistake. The agency of the Spirit, mighty as it is, is yet secret and imperceptible; and cannot be directly distinguished from the operations of our minds. It is discerned in its effects. It acts in a manner suited to our rational and accountable nature; and is constantly to be tried by the written word of Holy Scripture, and by no other rule. Even the inexpressible emotions to which we have alluded correspond with the revealed will of God; and lead, not to enthusiasm, but to the fulfilment of that will; not to visions, and raptures, and voices, and external and audible groanings;

but to purity and humility and devotion and the love of God.

Rely, then, on the silent and sacred guidance of the Holy Spirit. Implore his inspiration, and do homage to his work. Let nothing deter you from persevering prayer—no sense of weakness, no temptations, no fears. Thus shall you be further assisted in the duty. You shall be enabled to lay open your wants, and to plead your whole cause before God. The time will perhaps come, when, in the holy elevations of devotion, you shall feel more than any words can express; and when, in your exercises of sorrow for sin, of faith in Christ Jesus, of love to God, and desires of the heavenly felicity, you shall attain an enlargement of thought, a copiousness of expression, a humility and yet a fervour and confidence of mind, which shall lead you to bless and adore the mercy of your Saviour. And even in your present early stage of Christian piety, the promised aid of the Holy Ghost under your infirmities is surely more calculated to inspire you with encouragement, than the circumstance of your low attainments in spirituality of devotion, is to fill you with despair. And besides, you have this additional assurance of being heard in your petitions, that these petitions are suggested by this blessed influence. God himself is the author of them. Our heavenly Father

does not listen to them as new and strange, nor reject them as absurd; but kindly receives them as suggested by his Spirit, and agreeable to his will; *He that searcheth the hearts, knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.*

Let, then, the sense of your infirmities lead you to a more entire reliance on the Holy Spirit. God afflicts us with trouble, and awakens us to a sense of our misery, not that we should pine away with grief, but that we should seek his grace and obtain relief by prayer. And the safest state of mind in which we can be, is that of humility under our deficiencies, and eager desire after greater attainments in devotion, and every other Christian duty.

II. BUT WHAT SHALL I SAY TO THOSE, WHOM THIS WHOLE ARGUMENT MUST CONVICT OF LIVING WITHOUT PRAYER? Such are assuredly without God and without Christ. Prayer is the breath, as it were, of the soul. When Paul was struck to the earth by the Saviour on his way to Damascus, the first evidence of his conversion was, *Behold, he prayeth!* And in every age, the first indication of spiritual life is prayer. And yet you continue strangers, in fact, to this holy exercise. You are contented with the offering of the lips, without any movement of the affections. You join in the public prayers of

the church, but you never confess your sins from your heart, you never once unite with holy fervency in the petitions of our devout Litany. In your families you live without prayer, though you call yourselves Christians. And as to your closet, you are strangers there; or at best a few formal words suffice to satisfy your consciences. You never pray with feeling, with importunity, with constancy, with spirituality; that is, you never pray at all. Witness your reluctance to secret devotion. Witness your indifference in it. Witness your frequent omission of the duty. Witness your entire unconsciousness of all those infirmities which the best Christian most knows and laments, because he is most in earnest about his salvation. Witness your ignorance of the work of the Holy Spirit, and your contempt of the doctrine of his grace. Witness your reliance on your own understanding and your own powers for serving God. Allow an honest appeal to be made to your conscience. Would you not treat with ridicule a humble Christian who should speak, with whatever sobriety, of the help and intercession of the Holy Spirit in prayer, and of the *groanings that cannot be uttered*, which flow from it? Then surely your hearts must be wrong before God. Surely all is yet to be begun in you as to religion. And it must begin at this point—THE WORK AND ILLUMINATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Prostrate, then, yourselves in contrition before the throne of mercy. Ask of God that gift of his Holy Spirit which he has promised to all that seek it. Be once in earnest, and you will soon perceive the unnumbered diseases and infirmities of your soul. The aid of the Holy Ghost will then appear to you the most desirable and suitable of all blessings. What you now despise or disregard, you will then value above all price, and seek with intense solicitude. Nor shall you seek it in vain. It is the gracious office of the Holy Spirit to help your infirmities. He will condescend to teach you and to guide you in the ways of repentance, justification, holiness, obedience, and joy ; he will be to you a comforter and sanctifier, will intercede in your heart here, and prepare you for eternal glory hereafter.

SERMON XIV.

THE PROMISES OF GOD.

2 PETER, I. 4.

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

THE manner in which the privileges of the Christian are connected with the possession of holiness in every part of the Bible, is very remarkable. The corrupt heart of man sometimes attempts to separate the two, but the Sacred Scriptures constantly exhibit them in union with each other. The plan of salvation is altogether holy in its design and in its tendency. The death of Christ was a most solemn display of the justice and righteousness and purity of God. Repentance implies a hatred and renunciation of all sin. Faith is a spiritual and holy principle. The blessed Spirit of God is the author and source of sanctification. The commands

of God are *holy, just, and good*. His threatenings are designed to guard us against transgression, and to evince his abhorrence of iniquity. His promises also, as we learn in the text, are given us with the express intention of rescuing us from the corruption of the world, and making us *partakers of a divine nature*. This latter point is the more remarkable, because it might at first sight be thought, that the promises of God were rather calculated to promote our consolation than our obedience. But these are in fact inseparable. In communicating joy, they increase our willing subjection to the divine precepts. This will appear as we consider the passage to which our attention is now to be directed. In doing this, we shall point out,

I. The excellency of the divine promises.

II. The design for which they are given.

We will consider,

I. THE EXCELLENCY OF THE DIVINE PROMISES.

The promises of Scripture are generally declarations which God has made of his intention to bestow blessings upon his faithful people. Under the Old Testament dispensation, to which the Apostle refers, the promises mainly related to the future advent of the Messiah. All other blessings pointed to this, or were included in it. The promises, collectively taken, were fre-

quently spoken of as centering in Christ. To the Israelites *pertained the promises*. Our Lord came to *confirm the promises made unto the fathers*. To Abraham and his seed were the promises made. In each of these, as well as in numerous other instances, the coming of Christ, and the blessings connected with his advent, are chiefly, if not exclusively, intended. St. Peter, in our text, has an especial regard to those gracious engagements, which assured the church of the divine mercy through the advent of the Messiah, and the sacrifice and atonement he should make for sin, to those Scriptures which predicted the establishment and general diffusion of his Gospel, and described the full pardon which would flow from his sufferings and death, the larger effusion of the Holy Spirit; the abundant measures of light, liberty, confidence, peace, holiness, and joy which would follow his resurrection; and the final extension, glory, and permanence of his kingdom. These promises were in part fulfilled by the coming of Jesus Christ, and the descent of the Holy Spirit. They included, as our Apostle speaks in the verse preceding the text, *all things pertaining to life and godliness*, every blessing needful for our spiritual and eternal felicity—for enabling us to act suitably to our relation and obligations to God in our passage through life, and for our attaining endless happiness in heaven;—all the

pardon, strength, and consolation, all the instructions, motives, and encouragements, all the means, principles, and assistances which a truly godly life can require ; in a word, all the blessings of that *better covenant established on better promises*, which the Messiah was to introduce, and with the expectation of which the prophets had repeatedly consoled the church.

This Covenant is, in fact, one comprehensive promise, and contains all the provisions of God's grace, which the separate promises, whether of the old dispensation or the new, scattered throughout the Scriptures, amplify and confirm. The terms of it are these : *After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.* Jer. xxxi. 33, 34 ; xxxii. 40 ; Heb. viii. 6—12. So that illumination, pardon, holiness, and union with God ; that is, all imaginable mercies and benefits, are

included in this one rich and overflowing promise.

It will serve, however, to give a more distinct and powerful impression of the extent of these blessings, if we briefly exhibit a specimen of those particular promises of the Old Testament (for to these the text requires us to confine ourselves; though its terms are obviously still more applicable to those of the Gospel), which spring from this evangelical covenant, and which are designed to relieve the various necessities and to console the hearts of the faithful: and we cannot trace them out better than by considering the various occasions on which a true penitent would naturally be led to have recourse to them.

One of the first blessings which an awakened sinner perceives himself to need is, DIVINE TEACHING. He becomes sensible of his natural blindness as to spiritual things. How appropriate, then, is the promise, *All thy children shall be taught of the Lord! Good and upright is the Lord, therefore will he teach sinners in the way!*

He is prone to doubt whether God will RECEIVE SO GUILTY AND UNWORTHY A CREATURE; but he is encouraged with the promise, *Seek ye the Lord—for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of*

a sinner, but that the sinner should turn from his ways and live. He that confesseth and forsaketh his sins, shall find mercy.

He perceives his extreme need of PARDON AND JUSTIFICATION before God; and he learns at the same time, that God abundantly pardons; that he is ready to forgive; that though our sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow, though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool; that by his knowledge his righteous servant justifies many; that the Messiah finished transgression and made an end of sin, and made reconciliation for iniquity and brought in everlasting righteousness.

The penitent feels the power of his passions and corruptions, and his inability, with all his efforts, to change his own heart and attain real SANCTIFICATION. What encouragement, then, does he derive from the promise: *Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you; a new heart also will I give unto you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes; and ye shall keep my judgments and do them!*

If, again, he needs CONSOLATION under his various afflictions, he may rejoice in the divine

assurance, *For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but in great mercy will I gather thee; in a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy upon thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer.*

Does he humbly pray for DELIVERANCE out of trouble? Mark the promise: *Call upon me in the day of trouble, so will I deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.*

Does he desire the DIVINE GUIDANCE? What says the Scripture? *I will bring the blind by a way which they knew not, I will lead them in paths which they have not known; I will make darkness light before them and crooked things straight: these things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.*

Is he in danger of DESPAIR from the remembrance of any especial departure from the ways of duty, and does he long to return to God? The gracious promise meets him, *Return, thou backsliding Israel, and I will heal thy backslidings. I have seen his ways, and will heal him.*

Do TEMPORAL CONCERNS occupy him with anxious thoughts? He is told, that *the young lions shall lack and suffer hunger; but they that seek the Lord, shall not want any good thing.*

In the solemn hour of DEATH itself, when he peculiarly stands in need of support and conso-

lation, he may rely on the declaration, *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction.*

Does he require an assurance of his part in THE FUTURE GLORY OF HEAVEN? Let him say with Job, *Though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God; whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold and not another.* Or with the Psalmist, *Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy, at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*

Finally, do any other IMAGINABLE DIFFICULTIES, distinct from those which we have mentioned, occur to his mind? They are all included in the promise; *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee. The Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.*

Are not these promises, then, and the almost unnumbered variety of similar ones which it is impossible for me to detail, EXCEEDING GREAT AND PRECIOUS? Are they not of the widest extent and of the most inestimable price? Whether you consider them in the aggregate, as they are contained in the covenant of grace, or

whether you regard them as to the particular adaptation of them to the necessities of the true servants of God, does it not surpass all the capacities of our minds to describe their richness, or estimate their amount? It is not common, indeed, that greatness and worth should be equally united in the same object. What is magnificent as to the extent of its power, is not often in a like degree valuable for its excellence. But in the promises of God greatness and worth are found in the same profusion, and serve to augment the glory and effulgence of the whole. They are EXCEEDING GREAT, if you regard the author of them, God; who bestows them in a manner worthy of himself, confirming them by his oath, and fulfilling them by the greatness of his power and faithfulness. They are great, if you consider the subjects of them, deliverance from all evil, the bestowing of all good, every thing that man, a needy, guilty, weak, sinful creature, burdened with a corrupt nature, and beset by powerful and crafty spiritual foes can want, in a world of temptation and misery. They are great, if you view *the multitude which no man can number of every nation and kindred and people and tongue*, to all whose several necessities, in all ages of the church, and under every variety of circumstances, they are exactly adapted. They are great, if you look forward to the final end which they are to accomplish,

the eternal salvation of the faithful in the vision of God. In short, they cannot but be *exceeding great*—the very greatest possible—when you consider that they come from God and lead to him, that they satisfy and fill the utmost desires and even conceptions of the Christian's mind in his most matured state of knowledge and feeling; that they contain all that man can receive, and all that God, in the munificence of his bounty, sees it necessary to bestow.

Nor is their *VALUE* less than their greatness. The impenitent indeed can know nothing of the real worth of the promises of God, because they were never in a state of mind to perceive their need of them or to experience the relief they afford. General notions of God's mercy bring little blessedness into the heart. But a holy apprehension of our personal concern in the *precious promises* of God, is as life from the dead. It is as a fragrance which restores the fainting traveller. It is as a reprieve to a condemned criminal. It derives an inestimable value, not only from the benefits which it conveys, but also from the urgency of the danger from which it delivers us. What must be the value of the promise of pardon and eternal life to a soul trembling with a sense of its guilt and agitated with despair! What the importance of consolation, in the very tide and torrent of affliction! What the assurance of strength and

victory, under the very pressure of the conflict ! The promises are to the true Christian treasures of light and truth, seals of salvation, securities of future bliss, conveyances of the inheritance of heaven. They are fraught with peace, and hope, and joy ; they assure us of our interest in the love of our dying and risen Saviour, and of our participation in all the rich communications of the Holy Spirit ; they serve to fill the empty and raise the drooping heart, to excite the sinking faith, and quicken the exhausted patience. Let him speak their preciousness who has felt it, who has lain a penitent at the foot of Calvary, who has wrestled in tears against a rebellious nature, who has anticipated the horrors of that gulf, to which his sins would have sunk him, and the bright radiance of that bliss to which the promises exalt his hope.

And if the promises as they were revealed in the Old Testament were thus *exceeding great and precious*, what must they be now that they have received all the explications and additions of the New—all those which our Lord himself uttered with his gracious lips—all those which abound in the various parts of the inspired books with which the canon of Scripture closes. Here we have the promises unfolded and enlarged, placed in the brightest light, and communicated with the most attractive benignity. What was dark before is now clear, what was preparatory

is now perfect, what was earthly is now spiritual, what was temporary is now eternal. The blessings of the promises are now exhibited in all their profusion and all their glory, since Christ has actually appeared : whilst the manner in which they are conveyed is no longer figurative and obscure, but direct and intelligible, open to every understanding and unveiled to every heart.

Such then are the promises which are GIVEN TO US *through the knowledge of Him who has called us to glory and virtue.* The freeness with which they are bestowed, enhances inconceivably their worth. Our guilt as sinners would for ever have excluded us from the blessings they unfold, if they were to be purchased by our own merit ; our alienation from God, would have equally prevented our employing any efforts to obtain them, if they were to be sought for, in the first instance, by our own spontaneous exertions. But they are given. When God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son to die for sinners, with him he freely gave us all things. *All the promises of God in Christ are yea and in him amen to the glory of God by us.* They are thus set before all mankind in the Gospel, and every penitent sinner is invited to come and partake of the blessings comprised in them. Nay, they are actually bestowed on every true penitent. When by divine grace he inclines his

ear, and comes to Christ, *the everlasting covenant*, to use the language of the Prophet, *is made with him, even the sure mercies of David*. This covenant, as we have already seen, comprehends all the various promises of God, which are graciously fulfilled according as his circumstances and true interests require, and in the time and manner which seem best to the wisdom of God. In short, it comprehends all the blessings connected with that eternal life, which is *the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord*. The greater part of the separate promises are indeed conditional, as we shall have to notice under the next head of this discourse, and can only be appropriated as we fulfil the terms on which they are suspended; yet as these conditions are not meritorious, but are in fact the subject of other promises, and are performed by the grace of the Holy Spirit; and as the blessings conveyed by all of them, even pardon, holiness, consolation, and eternal life, are at last gratuitously bestowed, we must ascribe the praise of the whole, not in any respect to ourselves, but entirely and unreservedly to the free and unmerited mercy of God.

But it is time for us to consider,

II. THE DESIGN FOR WHICH THESE PROMISES ARE GIVEN, *that by these you might be partakers*

of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

The two designs of the promises, then, are a deliverance from the corruptions of the world, and a participation of the purity of God. When the gracious promises of Scripture are rightly believed and appreciated, they prove the means of rescuing us from a sinful and worldly life; and they direct and enable us to aspire after a conformity to the divine nature. These two effects are inseparable: we must be detached from the world, if we would be followers of God. The full accomplishment of the promises is to be experienced in the entire renewal of the soul, and its resemblance of God in his holiness. This is what the text states simply and explicitly—*that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*

What this CORRUPTION is, need scarcely be described. *All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.* Men by their concupiscence and ungoverned passions corrupt each other. We have only to look into our cities and towns and villages, even in this Christian country, to be appalled at the rebellion against God, and consequent misery, which unbridled desires of various kinds occasion. *From within, out of the heart of men,*

proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, pride, blasphemy, foolishness; all these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

THE DIVINE NATURE stands opposed to all this corruption. We are partakers of it, not as to its essence, but as to its moral qualities so far as they are communicable. There are many perfections of the blessed God to which the divine nature in us bears no resemblance—as his omniscience, omnipotence, supremacy, and independent and necessary existence. There are many parts also of the renewed disposition in us which have no counterpart in God, and which would be imperfections in him—as submission, humility, fear, and faith. But so far as the moral attributes of God are opposed to the corruption of the world, we are made partakers of them. We are to be *holy as God is holy*. We are to be *renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created us*. We are to *put on the new man which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness*. We are to *purify ourselves even as God is pure*. We are to be *followers of God, as dear children*. *God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God and God in him*. Thus, as man was originally made in God's image, after his likeness, and as he lost this image by the fall, so he is

now restored by the *washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost*, to a divine temper and disposition, a bent and tendency of mind which come from God and which conduct to him, which bear the impress of his holiness, and exhibit some faint adumbration of his moral glory.

It might seem at the first view surprising, that the *exceeding great and precious promises* of Scripture should have the effect of delivering us from this corruption of the world, and communicating to us the correspondent blessing of a participation of the *divine nature*. That the commands of God should produce these consequences might appear natural; and that the warnings and threatenings of God should have such a tendency, might also seem obvious; but that gratuitous blessings should operate in this manner, is perhaps not altogether so intelligible. A very little attention, however, will be sufficient to place this point in a clear light.

But first let me caution you against considering the promises as the only method which God employs for our sanctification. The regeneration of the soul is the work of his Holy Spirit, who *of his own will begets us by the word of truth*. But it is not the word of promise only which the Spirit employs in this work. The terrors of his law are ordinarily the means

of producing the first movements of true repentance. In all the course also of a Christian's life, there are various other appointed means of grace, which, as well as the promises, conduce to the ends of sanctification. The declaration of the text must therefore be only understood to assert that the design and the tendency of the promises, as well as of the other truths of the Holy Scriptures, is, by giving strength to our faith, animation to our hope, and fervour to our supplications, to encourage us to a ceaseless pursuit of holiness, and thus to make us partakers of the divine nature.

That this is the direct tendency of the divine promises may appear, first, from the consideration that it is the view of his LOVE AND GRACE as displayed in the Gospel of his Son, which God is pleased chiefly to employ to win the heart to his service. The true penitent (and to him alone the promises belong) is *constrained by the love of Christ to live, not unto himself, but unto Him that died for him and rose again.* Terrors may produce sorrow and contrition, but it is the promises which chiefly animate to the pursuit of universal holiness. Injunctions may deter from evil, but it is the sense of the divine mercy which raises the heart to what is good. The law may prescribe the rule of duty, the grace of the Gospel alone can incline us to observe it. The natural man may see God on

Mount Sinai and fly from him, the humble penitent beholds him on Mount Sion, and learns to delight in doing his will.

THE ASSURANCES OF ASSISTANCE offered to us in the promises tend also directly to promote holiness. Despair unnerves the soul. The perpetual discomfitures which we meet with when we attempt to serve God in our own strength, increase our actual bondage. But when the promise of the grace of the Holy Spirit encourages the heart, we rise to resist sin and to tread the path of duty. It is when assured that God will *work in us to will and to do*, that we begin in earnest to *work out our own salvation*. His engagement to instruct and teach us, may well animate us to inquire after his will. His promise to receive the returning sinner, may well move him to repent. When Christ declares that he will *cast out none who come unto him*, we are led to approach him. His assurance that he will *be with two or three that meet together in his name*, tends to excite us to a devout attendance on his worship. When commanded to draw nigh to God, and promised the aid of the Spirit to assist us in doing so, we are encouraged in the attempt to pray. The hope of support in trouble, relief in distress, joy in sorrow, and life in death, which we derive from this source, strengthens us to press onwards through every difficulty. The pro-

promise of forgiveness excites us to forsake sin; the promise of inward grace, to mortify it; the promise of a new heart stimulates us to labour after its renewal in the divine image; and the promise of future glory, to prepare ourselves for heaven.

Again, the CONDITIONS annexed to the promises, make them the powerful means of producing in us conformity to the *divine nature*. I mean by conditions the terms with which it has pleased God to connect the fulfilment of his promises. These are frequently expressed. *To him that ordereth his conversation aright, will I show the salvation of God. The meek will he guide in judgment. All things work together for good to them that love God. My sheep hear my voice and they follow me, and they shall never perish. If any man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him.* It is obvious that such promises must tend to produce in true Christians those dispositions and that character to which alone they are made. It will be found that by far the largest number of the separate promises, if not all of them, are of this kind. They are made to attach to the disposition and state of mind of the individual. The prophetic parts of Scripture indeed abound with promises which are of a more absolute and unconditional description; but these are evidently addressed to the church of God. And

before we venture to apply them to ourselves, an inquiry ought previously to be instituted, whether our true repentance, faith, and holy conduct, exhibit the necessary evidence that we are indeed members of that body. In the Epistles also many promises are again addressed to particular churches, to the saints, the elect, the holy brethren; but these still require the same careful examination whether we are of the number of the true servants of God, before we apply them to ourselves. I allow, indeed, that the very power to fulfil the terms of the promises is the fruit of divine mercy, and is to be ascribed to God's grace alone, and not to any thing in ourselves: still, as the previous conditions must be accomplished before the stipulated blessings are appropriated, such promises, if believed, directly tend to produce obedience.

But I ask once more, what is the matter of God's promises—what are the BLESSINGS THEMSELVES WHICH THEY HOLD OUT TO US? Do they not all either imply holy obedience, or directly include it? Repentance, faith, love, joy, hope, peace, strength, communion with God, are subjects of the promises; and what are these but parts of sanctification? The Holy Spirit as the teacher, guide, comforter and “sanctifier of all the elect people of God,” as our church expresses it, is the great promise of the New Testament; and is he not the source

of the Christian's holiness? Again, pardon, justification, and adoption, are blessings which God has promised: and what are these but the removal of the hinderances which interposed to prevent our *serving God without fear*? Go through all the blessings which are promised in the Sacred Scriptures, and you will find them to be either connected with sanctification, or included in it; so that the possession of them implies holiness in the possessor; implies that he has communion with God through his Spirit; that he is united to his Saviour by faith; that he is a partaker of the divine nature, and an heir and expectant of heaven.

I ask, again, what are the direct and necessary EFFECTS of such promises, when they are received? They are the nutriment of faith *which worketh by love*. They inspire hope *which purifies the heart even as God is pure*; which is represented as the anchor of the soul, and as our helmet in the day of conflict. Through their power we obtain the victory over the world. Having *these promises, we cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God*. They fill the mind with love to Christ, who *loads us daily with such benefits*. They awaken the powerful and operative principle of gratitude. They lead to unreserved devotedness to God. They encourage to perseverance in the ways of reli-

gion. They work, in short, not as the presumptuous hope of a mere exemption from punishment would work on an earthly and unrenewed mind, but as a scriptural expectation of spiritual blessings operates on a new and heavenly nature. They work therefore not as an opiate to stupify, but as a medicine to restore. And all this they do, not by a mere natural process, but by the gracious appointment of God, that through his mercy and the power of his Spirit, the cordial belief and reception of them should lead to purity here, and end in heaven hereafter.

But why do I enter into these details upon a point which every true Christian feels in his constant observation and experience? If ever he has done any thing for God, it has been by means of the promises. If ever he has mortified his passions or cultivated a temper of universal holiness, it has been by the grace of the Gospel. If ever he has *escaped from the corruption which is in the world through lust, and become in a measure partaker of the divine nature*, it has been by faith in the power and love of his Saviour. If ever he hopes to hold on in his path of obedience and to reach the bliss of heaven, it is by looking constantly to *the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ*. Salvation is of grace. Sanctification, as well as justification, flow from the stupendous sacrifice of the cross of Christ.

It is in the exertion of his persevering endeavours indeed, that holiness is communicated; but these endeavours, severed from the almighty operations of the Spirit, which gave them birth, would prove unavailing. *He can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth him; whilst without him he can do nothing.* It is in this way and no other, that he is enabled to add, as our Apostle goes on to state in the verses following the text, *to his faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity.* It is thus that he is enabled to *make his calling and election sure,* and that at last an *entrance is ministered unto him abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

After these statements, it will be sufficient, in closing the whole discourse, to notice

THE TEST WHICH IT FURNISHES OF OUR STATE BEFORE GOD.

We learn from this important passage that, to be true Christians, we must *escape the corruption of the world*—must be *partakers of the divine nature*—must account the *promises of God to be exceeding great and precious.* This is obvious. And yet how many are there who call themselves by the name of Christ, and yet have

never done, nor ever thought, or intended to do, any one of these things! They love the world in which they live, even as others. They *make provision for the flesh, that they may fulfil the lusts thereof*. Of any change of heart and nature, they are utterly ignorant; or if they have heard of it, they undervalue or despise it. The *preciousness* of the promises sounds enthusiastic and extravagant in their ears, although such texts as that we are considering, serve to restrain their open avowal of the sentiment. Their religion, such as it is, is quite consistent with the supreme love of earthly things; it easily amalgamates with the common pursuits and passions of mankind, it embraces not the necessity of a divine nature, it meddles not with the promises of grace; these are a dead letter, uninteresting, perplexing, obscure.

Let such persons be reminded by the text of their extreme danger. Let them know that, before they can enter heaven, they must be delivered from the world, must renounce the corruptions which reign over them by lust, must be *born again, and created anew* in Christ Jesus, must seek for salvation by the *great and precious promises* of the Gospel, must discover and feel their need of the blessings they unfold, must esteem them more than *gold, yea than much fine gold*, and must live a holy life by the grace which dictated them, ‘If there be a word of

truth,' says a good writer, 'in all the Scriptures, unconverted sinners, dying such, will be miserable to eternity.' If men will put a general notion of God's mercy, in the place of his promises; if they will substitute a form of godliness for a divine nature; and a mere decency and good order before others, for an *escape from the corruption which is in the world through lust*, they must perish. It cannot be otherwise. The word of God expressly makes the declaration.

But I would rather hope that such may in some measure be convinced of their perilous state by what has been advanced. I trust you begin to feel that you cannot be saved as you are. This is an important step. *Draw nigh then to God*, and submit yourselves to the terms of the Gospel. When you begin seriously to desire the holy salvation which God has revealed, his *exceeding great and precious promises* may be considered as addressed to you. You come within the scope of them. The lowest and most feeble desires after true religion will derive encouragement from them. *God delighteth in mercy. He abundantly pardons. He has no pleasure in the death of a sinner.* He promises his Holy Spirit to *all who ask him*. He solemnly declares that *he that seeks shall find, and that to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.* He expressly promises that *whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.* He

bids us *take with us words and turn unto him*; and we are assured that he marks and observes the first emotions of penitence and prayer.

Let then these declarations guide you to his footstool. *The Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Christ Jesus may be given to them that believe.* If you see this promise to be *exceeding great and precious*, an important point is already gained. To feel the value of the promises, is an evidence of spiritual life. If you begin to know that you need a new heart, and that without a *divine nature* you can never get to heaven: this proves that the Spirit of God is at work in your mind. If you discern the corruption which lust and disobedience have occasioned in the world, and earnestly desire to escape from it lest you should be involved in destruction: this clearly indicates that you have already within you the seed of those dispositions to which the promises are made. Go on in the strength of these promises; use them; implore of God to fulfil them to you as your necessities, while engaged in the pursuit of pardon and grace, require. You shall not seek in vain. *He is faithful that hath promised.* Whilst the other parts of Scripture will teach you the fall of man, the dealings of God with his church, the offices of Christ and the nature of his kingdom, the evil of sin, the scheme of redemption, the

duties of the Christian life, the temptations to which it is exposed, and the warnings and exhortations by which it is to be guarded, the belief of the PROMISES, in all their greatness and value, will tend to deliver you more and more from the *corruption which is in the world through lust*, and gradually form you anew after the holy image of your God. Thus shall you be trained for heaven. You shall be *followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises*. At last you shall attain complete redemption; *for this is the promise which he hath promised us*—the ultimate and concluding blessing, that to which all the provisions of the everlasting covenant, and all the grace of the separate promises, have respect, and in which they shall all receive their accomplishment—even ETERNAL LIFE.

SERMON XV.

RELIGIOUS DEJECTION.

PSALM LXXVII. 10.

*I said, This is my infirmity; but I will remember
the years of the right hand of the Most High.*

THERE are few cases which require more compassion and more wisdom in the treatment of them than that of religious dejection. Religious melancholy is the disease of piety, and must be treated as such, if we would hope to remove it. We must consider its symptoms, endeavour to trace out its causes, and then prescribe its cure. The inspired writer of the Psalm from which the text is taken, appears to have been under its influence. He is bowed down with the pressure of affliction, he can discover no indications of God's former favour, he is filled with fearful apprehensions of his anger, with the utmost grief of mind, and with an anxiety bordering on despair; and he finds no relief for his *infirmity*, until he *remembers the years of the right hand of the Most High*; until calling to

mind the mercy and loving-kindness of God which have been ever of old, he is again enabled to hope in him, and to rejoice in his salvation.

Let us then consider the symptoms, the cause, and the cure of religious dejection.

We notice,

I. THE SYMPTOMS OF RELIGIOUS DEPRESSION:

The despondency of irreligious persons, when conscience has alarmed their fears, and keen disappointments have broken their spirits and filled them with forebodings of eternal punishment, is not the case we have to consider. Nor are the distresses and solitudes of an awakened penitent, when, first convinced of sin, he anxiously inquires after the way of salvation in Christ Jesus, the indications of it. These are rather favourable signs. They do not imply the existence of a disease, but they are salubrious and medicinal. Nor is the seriousness of mind which ever becomes a Christian in this world of temptation, where he is called to *work out his salvation with fear and trembling, and to pass the time of his sojourning in fear*, the index of religious melancholy. Neither are the occasional fluctuations in the religious feelings to which all the sincere servants of God are more or less subject, the evidences of its existence.

The proper symptoms of it are to be found in a settled depression of mind, in a perplexing

debility and agitation of spirit, an apprehension of God's indignation, a prevailing doubt of our pardon and acceptance before him, a dark view of the events which occur in the course of God's providential dealings with us, a succession of gloomy forebodings as to our future circumstances and destination, and a sinking of the heart, especially when we turn to subjects connected with our personal interest in the blessings of redemption. The appearances will vary in different cases, but they will partake in all of the general character that has been described.

Thus Jacob, when the loss of his beloved Joseph had long distressed his mind, when he received the intelligence of the severe treatment which his other sons had met with in Egypt, and found that Benjamin must also be separated from him, exclaimed with a touching melancholy, *Me have ye bereaved of my children : Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away : all these things are against me.* This is not, indeed, a case of settled depression ; but it serves to convey an idea of it. Such feelings, if they had continued long, and had fixed themselves in the soul, would have *brought down* the Patriarch's *gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.*

Hannah, again, vexed by the reproaches of Peninnah, cast down at the disappointment of her hopes, and receiving no answer to her

prayers, was under a dejection of spirit. She went up to the temple, a *woman of a sorrowful spirit*, and *out of the abundance of her complaint and grief poured out her soul before the Lord*. She was in *bitterness of soul*. Her *adversary provoked her sore*. She *wept, and did eat no bread*. This continued year by year. These were symptoms of the disease we are to treat.

The same, under different circumstances, was the case of Naomi. She was *left of her two sons and her husband* in a foreign land. When she arose to return from the country of Moab, one of her daughters-in-law *went back unto her people and to her gods*. She arrived at Bethlehem, and *all the city was moved, and said, Is this Naomi?* And she said, *Call me not Naomi (pleasant), but call me Mara (bitter), for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty; why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me and the Almighty hath afflicted me?*

The instance of Elijah may also be mentioned, when he received the threatening message from Jezebel, and *arose and went for his life and came to Beersheba, and went a day's journey into the wilderness, and sat down under a juniper-tree, and requested for himself that he might die*. Dejection preyed upon his mind, and he con-

cluded that he only was left in Israel, a prophet of the Lord.

The dejection of Job assumed yet more distinctly and fully the appearance of religious depression. Hear his distressing language: *Even to-day is my complaint bitter; my stroke is heavier than my groaning. The arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit; the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me. My sighing cometh before I eat, and my roarings are poured out like water. My soul is weary of life. Thou writest bitter things against me, thou holdest me for thine enemy.*

The case of the Church, however, in the Prophet, and of the royal Psalmist, will furnish us with the most complete view of the symptoms of this malady. *Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord? My judgment is passed over from my God? But Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.* This is the language of an habitual gloom of mind. It resembles that of the Psalm in which the text occurs. *In the day of my trouble,* exclaims the sacred author, *I sought the Lord; my sore ran in the night and ceased not—he prayed earnestly, but found no consolation. My soul refused to be comforted—a fixed melancholy seized him. I remembered God and was troubled — even*

meditation on God, which is the usual source of relief, aggravates his malady. *I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed*—billows of distress rose all around, and deluged, as it were, his soul. *Thou holdest mine eyes waking, I am so troubled I cannot speak*—neither sleep, nor prayer, nor praise could yield him any succour. *I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart, and my spirit made diligent search.*—He inquires after evidences of God's former favour, but to no purpose. *Will the Lord cast off for ever? Will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?*—With mixed emotions of fear, agitation, and anxious solicitude, he asks in melancholy strains, if he is rejected of God, if the divine mercy is exhausted; if his faithfulness and grace have failed; if his anger hath shut up the bowels of his compassion. *And I said, This is my infirmity.*—This is my disease, my distress. I cannot explain the questions which I have put. I cannot tell what to do. I am filled with the greatest consternation, and excruciated with unceasing anguish of mind. Though the relation of God to his people, and his attributes of grace and mercy, might seem in every other case to

afford hope of deliverance, yet so singular and oppressive are my calamities, that the contemplation of them serves only to enhance my misery and to aggravate my forebodings of final rejection at the hands of God.

Such then are some of the symptoms of a religious depression of mind. We proceed to consider,

II. THE CAUSES OF IT.

It is undoubtedly sometimes natural and occasioned by **BODILY DISTEMPER**. Religious feelings may ebb and flow with the animal spirits. Infirm, debilitated constitutions greatly affect the operations of the mind. Persons in such circumstances, are ready to view things on the most gloomy side, and the least circumstance may occasion dejection. They are too apt to fix on the more awful and profound parts of truth, and to perplex themselves with embarrassing questions, which tend to increase the malady. Confinement also without exercise, or change of scene, will often tend to produce depression. An excess of business likewise, and engagements wearing and exhausting the strength, or an occupation unfriendly to the health, may have the same consequences. I mention this class of causes first, because, if the spring of dejection be corporeal malady, the case is at once, in a great measure, accounted for;

and as miraculous interpositions are no longer to be expected, the aid of the physician must be sought.

SUPERSTITION is at times an occasion of religious dejection in those pious persons, who are in situations unfavourable for acquiring knowledge. An over-scrupulous conscience administers food to such a disposition. There is nothing so trifling which a superstitious and scrupulous mind may not magnify into an affair of vital importance. The conscience has not a healthy sensibility, but is irritable. They can say, or do nothing without exciting an unnatural alarm, an alarm for which no reasonable account can be given. Reliance on dreams, sudden impressions, illusive voices, imaginary warnings of the death of distant friends, casting lots, the opening of the Bible and fixing on the first verse which presents itself, is altogether vain, superstitious, and unlawful; and the exercise of any such unfounded reliance cannot fail to produce dangerous fancies and extraordinary gloom of mind. Vows rashly made, and apprehensions of having committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, have the same tendency. It is surprising that, in the present age and in a Protestant country, cases of this kind should so frequently occur; and that so many persons should be inapprehensive, or ignorant, of the folly and sin-

fulness of what is so explicitly rebuked and condemned in the Holy Scriptures.

A more common cause of this dejection is a MISAPPREHENSION OF THE DOCTRINE OF REMISSION OF SINS. The former causes are easily understood. This may be less obvious and accessible. The distress of the awakened and contrite heart is relieved by a persuasion of the grace of Christ in freely forgiving sin. When the penitent is led simply to credit this cheering truth and to act upon it, his extreme alarm subsides ; for peace of conscience is the natural fruit of faith in the blood of the Redeemer. Being *justified by faith, he has peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ* ; and he begins to walk in the ways of holy obedience with consistency, and with increasing spirituality and delight. But if he errs as to this scriptural course, if he mistakes the entire plan of the Gospel as a plan of salvation by grace, and continues to trust to himself, and to endeavour to *establish his own righteousness*, instead of *submitting himself to the righteousness of Christ*, his distress of mind is likely to increase, and if other things concur, to plunge him at last into a settled melancholy. Though he is truly penitent, yet he dares not believe that he is. Though he is invited freely to the cross of the Saviour, yet he ignorantly excludes himself from its benefits. Though all of every character who feel and acknowledge

their sins are urged to believe the Gospel, yet he conceives he is too great a sinner to venture to apply. Though he is instructed in the nature of the covenant of works and that of grace, yet he still cleaves confusedly to the law which can only condemn him. In the mean time, he labours and strives and watches and prays, but with little apparent success. Nay, he appears to himself to become worse. He mistakes the important doctrine of the necessity of evidences of his being in a state of salvation, for the necessity of his attaining certain previous qualifications to entitle him to come to Christ—an error of great magnitude. Thus he gradually sinks into despondency. Like the stricken deer, he wanders here and there for relief, but in vain, unconscious that he carries about with him the instrument of his malady. His mistake is, that he thinks he must make himself better before he comes to Christ, instead of first approaching him with the humility of a helpless sinner, that he may obtain the pardon of his sins and be sanctified by his Saviour's grace. Instead of this, he hopes to merit pardon and acceptance by his works. Hence he is filled with terror. His attempts fail, his performances are defective, and condemn him. Every discovery of the evil of his own heart and of the purity of God increases his perturbation and apprehension, and adds to his alarm. He comes at

last to a settled dejection of mind, approaching to despair.

But a still more frequent cause of this malady is SOME WILFUL SIN SECRETLY CHERISHED IN THE HEART OR PRACTISED IN THE LIFE. Like *the accursed thing* in the camp of Israel, this must be cast out, before a scriptural peace can be enjoyed. I speak not of sins of ignorance or infirmity, nor of the effects of sudden temptation, nor of the disallowed imperfections which, through the defilement of indwelling sin, cleave to our purest thoughts and most righteous actions : these ought not to occasion religious depression. The humble Christian, daily examining his conscience and confessing and forsaking his sins, is cleansed by the blood of Christ from all unrighteousness. But if some course of habitual sin, whether secret or open, be entered upon, some palpable inconsistency admitted, something which lays waste the conscience or grieves the Holy Spirit, the consequence frequently is, and ought to be, religious depression. It is not necessary in order to this, that a man should be altogether insincere or hypocritical, much less that he should openly renounce the truth of the Gospel. But if an allowed habit of evil has gained upon him, his serenity of mind must and will be proportionably disturbed. In a day of extensive religious profession like the present, such cases are not

uncommon. Christians are betrayed into a conformity to the vanities or pleasures of the world. They indulge themselves in things which, if not grossly sinful, are yet inexpedient. They maintain no proper self-government over themselves. A haughty temper toward their inferiors, an envious disposition toward their equals, or a spirit of insubordination with regard to those placed in authority over them, steals in a certain measure upon their minds. Covetousness secretly *set up as an idol in the heart*, to use the expression of the Prophet, is a sin which *eats as doth a canker*. Five times only is *lucre* mentioned in the New Testament, and in each case the epithet *filthy* is added to it, to note the peculiar danger of this *idolatry*. Sins of impurity, again, secretly indulged, and perhaps justified by specious sophisms, have been, and are, the ruin of many.

Whatever be the particular transgression, the effect of it is speedily seen in private devotional duties. These are either wholly neglected, or at least become heartless and languish. The circumspection is relaxed, and the simplicity of the soul is corrupted. Domestic cares leading men into unjustifiable methods of adding to their wealth, or the concerns of a trade or profession, conspire to deaden the heart. The *Holy Spirit is quenched*, and withdraws his influences. The mind, in which reli-

gion has been thus sickly, loses its tone and vigour; and when trouble comes on, it sinks into utter despondency. Even an excessive hurry and occupation from engagements in matters connected with religion, may have a similar effect, if they induce remissness in seeking God, and exclude secret and fervent communion with him.

But the malady is not yet at its height. The unhappy Christian, now in a declining course, has, perhaps, many checks of conscience, many warnings and manifestations of divine mercy. Perhaps some event in the course of providence rouses him. Some awakening sermon startles him in his lethargy. Some open disgrace occurring in the church to a fellow Christian not more culpable than himself, infuses terror into his soul. He repents. He seeks to return to God. He seems to walk with the Saviour for a time in deep contrition and watchfulness. After a while, however, his old sins, like a wound imperfectly healed, break open afresh. He relapses into some known iniquity. These declensions and revivings recur again and again, like the periodical intermission and return of a fever. But by each relapse his state of mind becomes worse; till at length, in some season of outward calamity perhaps, his soul is overcome by dejection. He knows too much of true religion to be happy without it; yet acts too

inconsistently to enjoy its pleasures. Conscience and inclination are at variance. He maintains fair appearances before his friends, and is as active perhaps as others in public concerns; but a worm secretly gnaws, as it were, his vitals, and a fixed melancholy pervades his mind.

In addition to these causes of dejection, LONG-CONTINUED AFFLICTION must likewise be mentioned. It is common to talk about afflictions, and it is easy to bear patiently the trials of others. We very readily recommend submission and resignation to a suffering friend. But to fall under the stroke of the Almighty ourselves, makes a different impression on the mind. If, however, the calamity be not overwhelming, or if it continue only for a short time, our faith may sustain it; especially if we apply the instruction of Holy Scripture, and submit with prayer and penitence to the will of God. But if the trial touch us precisely in our vulnerable part, or if it be continued long, and stroke succeeds stroke; if prayer appears not to be answered; if our case be conceived to be peculiar; if friends do not sympathize with us so tenderly as we expected; if God's mercies, which we thought were designed to comfort us, seem only granted to be withdrawn, and leave us tenfold more desolate than before; if the blessings of Providence appear to light

upon others around us without visiting us ; if the health and spirits, gradually worn and wasted with trouble, begin to fail, and the natural stoutness and fortitude of the mind to subside—then despondency is very likely to come on. Perhaps the wife or the husband is taken away, and one child and a second may be removed. Perhaps our circumstances become embarrassed. Perhaps long-continued persecution, so far as the happy constitution of our Protestant country will allow, oppresses us. Perhaps an individual in our family or connexion who is most disposed and most qualified to irritate our temper, remains to harass us. Whatever the affliction may be, if the heart be long vexed within us, and wave upon wave beat over us, it may be expected that religious dejection will gradually follow, and the soul be led to brood in dark gloom over its trouble.

To these causes must be added the TEMPTATIONS OF SATAN. This fell adversary lets nothing escape him. If he cannot destroy the soul, he will distress it and render it uncomfortable. His fiery darts are aimed at our weakest part. His suggestions to the imagination are like poisoned arrows. He *sifts us as wheat*. When the powers of darkness combine with external afflictions and a debilitated state of health and spirits, religious melancholy is often the consequence. Let it be remembered, however, that

even Satan can have no power over us, except as he is aided by our own culpable remissness, or the treachery of our hearts.

I mention, lastly, DESERTION, OR THE HIDING OF GOD'S COUNTENANCE. *When he hides his face, who then can behold him?* This was the affecting cause of Job's extreme depression. *O that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat! Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him.* David likewise frequently complains bitterly of the divine dereliction. He was an exile from God's house and reproached by God's enemies; till at last, trembling in his mind lest he should be cast away from the divine presence, he asks, *How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?* The church also in the Prophet was dejected, when God *in a little wrath hid his face from her for a moment.* We must remember also that our Lord, in the hour of his sufferings, complained of no other part of the cup of sorrow; but that when his heavenly Father withdrew the light of his favour, he exclaimed in unspeakable anguish, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* Under circumstances then of spiritual desertion the Christian sinks often into a depression of heart which weighs heavily upon

him, fills him with the most gloomy forebodings, and interrupts all sensible communion between him and his God.

But enough has been said on the causes of this distemper. It varies so greatly in the detail of almost every case, that only a general description of some of the more common occasions of it has been attempted.

I proceed therefore to consider,

III. THE CURE OF THIS DISEASE.

There are three very different methods adopted in the cure of religious melancholy: the one by the worldly person; the second by the inconsiderate but well-meaning Christian friend; the third by the faithful minister of the word of God.

The WORLDLY PERSON may have a sincere compassion for the dejected Christian, but, not understanding the case, cannot direct him to the proper cure. He considers religious depression as a vapour, a morbid state of the imagination. He is disposed to laugh at the terrors which are felt, and to propose diversion, pleasure, company, dissipation, and a round of business and engagements, as the appropriate remedy. When these injudicious methods are employed, the effect may be easily conjectured. They may remove lowness of spirits for a time, but it is by generating a still more dangerous

disease, by producing unconcern as to the state of the mind, a disregard of God, and an insensibility of conscience, which, if they continue, must issue in the absolute ruin of the soul. *Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks; walk in the light of your fire and in the sparks that ye have kindled; this shall ye have of mine hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow.*

A second mode is adopted by the INCONSIDERATE RELIGIOUS FRIEND. Without weighing different circumstances, he proposes the same remedy indiscriminately in every instance. He would comfort at all events, and through all impediments. He soothes and lulls the negligent Christian without an adequate knowledge of his disease. He exhorts him to joy in believing, and if there are insuperable obstacles to his immediately complying with this exhortation, he abandons him as desperate. At times he will overthrow many important doctrines of the Gospel, in order to establish the point in hand. Instead of examining the several causes of the depression, and applying the appropriate means, first for removing such causes, and then for administering comfort, he gives such an exhibition of the Gospel as indirectly encourages sin, separating its consolations from that diligence in renouncing evil habits, and in using the appointed means of grace, which always accompanies and

adorns a true faith in the promises of Christ. This is to administer an opiate, which composes, by stupifying. This is to heal *the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace.*

THE FAITHFUL MINISTER OF THE WORD OF GOD proceeds in another method. With all the compassion for the depressed Christian, and all the attachment to the doctrines of grace which any person can feel; he is anxious on the one hand to preserve uninjured the spirituality of the sufferer's mind; and on the other not to speak peace and comfort to him, except on solid and scriptural grounds. He endeavours to *discern things that differ, and to show himself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*

If the distressed Christian, then, seems to him to labour under bodily maladies or the effects of superstition, the minister will recommend in the first instance, A DUE ATTENTION TO THE HEALTH, AND A MORE CORRECT KNOWLEDGE OF THE WILL OF GOD. If a man's spirits are broken by excessive labour or study, he will advise him to seek relaxation, before he can expect serenity of mind. If a debilitated frame disorders, as it will do, the religious affections, he will direct him to distinguish between the natural consequences of bodily disease, and the effects of the displeasure of God. If supersti-

tious fears harass him, he will disclose the error, and exhort him to study the Bible: *To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this rule, it is because they have no light in them.*

In cases of distress which seem to spring from a misapprehension of the plan of the Gospel, the minister will delight to EXPATiate ON THE LOVE OF GOD in Christ Jesus. This he will display to the fainting heart of the penitent. He will tell him that God *delighteth in mercy*; that he has *no pleasure in the death of a sinner*; that he beseeches and entreats sinners to be reconciled; that the most stupendous exhibition of his grace was in his *so loving the world as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life*; that the spring and source of redemption itself was the immeasurable *love and kindness of God our Saviour towards man*. He will point the dejected penitent to the parables of the lost sheep and of the prodigal son, and will ask him whether *the joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth*, and the compassion of the father of the prodigal when he *saw him a great way off and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him*, do not show the unspeakable love of God.

THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE DEATH AND INTERCESSION OF THE SAVIOUR is, also, a topic

calculated to relieve this particular case. What can exceed the merits of our incarnate Lord? What surpass the virtue of his sacrifice? Who can condemn those whom he justifies? Is he not God as well as man? Is not his death a *propitiation for the sins of the whole world*? Did he not die *the just for the unjust*? Was not the law fulfilled by him, the moral government of God honoured, justice appeased, truth satisfied, and the demands of holiness answered? Is not Christ now in heaven as our intercessor? and *can he not save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him*? Shall a man presume to say, that his sins in particular are too great to be expiated by the blood of the Redeemer? Does not this savour more of self-importance than of humility?

THE FREE AND UNLIMITED INVITATION to sinners to approach this adorable Saviour, is likewise an appropriate means of relief here. *Who-soever will, let him come. Jesus stood and cried, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.* Let the dejected inquirer listen to these accents of mercy. Let him acknowledge the misery and disappointment which attend his efforts to become really holy on his present plan. Let him venture confidently on the grace of Christ. A free

and full salvation through the sacrifice of the cross is offered to him. He is a miserably weak and wretched being. For such a fallen creature to purchase heaven, or to change his own heart, or practise the duties of Christianity of himself, is impossible. He can do nothing that is free from sin, even although deliverance from eternal ruin were to be the consequence. Let him then, with his anxious and horror-struck mind, cast himself at the feet of his Saviour for free justification and effectual help, humbly imploring the divine Spirit to give him the peace and consolation arising from a sense of the pardon of his sins by the death of Christ, and strength to serve and obey him in newness of life.

But in the case of dejection of mind arising from some course of sin which has been secretly or openly committed, the minister of God's word must adopt another method. The grace and privileges of the Gospel are not the right topics to be employed, at least in the first instance. The conscience must, rather, be awakened to do its office. The whole state of the heart and conduct must be searched into; for the only effectual remedy that can be applied, under the divine blessing, in such a case, is to ERADICATE THE CAUSE OF THE MISCHIEF. If prayer in secret has been neglected; if habits unfavourable to growth in religion have been indulged; if a lax and remiss walk with God has been admit-

ted ; if lust, or covetousness, or pride, or pleasure, or wrath, or intemperance, or selfishness, have gradually got possession of our hearts, the advice to be given is obvious. We must renounce our sins, or our religion. Any one habitual transgression wilfully committed must exclude us from the kingdom of heaven. *Let no man deceive you with vain words, for because of such things the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death or of obedience unto righteousness?* True, the passion or the practice which you indulge may be dear to you as a right hand or a right eye—but dear as it is, you must renounce it, or perish. To persist in it, to excuse it, to hide it, will only aggravate your transgression. Your depression will increase, and so it ought. Your very conversion to God must become a question, and perhaps is even now questionable ; and it certainly can only be resolved by your humbly returning to a holy, consistent, watchful, circumspect obedience. Beg of God then to give you his Holy Spirit ; and begin at once this necessary duty. Be seriously attentive to all the means of grace. Set apart a portion of time, if possible, for fasting and prayer. It is one degree of effort which will preserve a man from falling into a pit ; but an effort much more

powerful is necessary to raise him out of a pit when he is once fallen. Extraordinary care, and study, and diligence are needful for you. But if you employ them in humility and faith, with penitence and prayer, you need not despair. God will help you. Though you have so far departed from him, *yet return now unto him, and he will heal your backslidings. Repent and do your first works.* Thus will the privileges and mercies of the Gospel be once more yours, and God will *restore to you the joys of his salvation.*

Should, however, long-continued afflictions be the principal cause of depression of mind, the Christian minister will, with the Psalmist, endeavour to take off the sufferer's view from his own particular calamities, and direct it to God's GENERAL DEALINGS WITH HIS SERVANTS. In the text, the inspired writer resolves to *remember the years of the right hand of the Most High*, apparently as the best method of healing the distemper of his mind. He accordingly first recounts God's ancient dealings with his church. He then breaks out into a celebration of his holiness and glory—*Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary; who is so great a God as our God?* He next commemorates the works of God in the deliverance of his people from Egypt, when he *redeemed them by his own arm, when the waters*

saw him and they were afraid, the depths also were troubled: when the descending storm with the fearful lightnings and earthquakes joined in discomfiting the enemy—The clouds poured out water, the skies sent out a sound; thine arrows went abroad; the voice of thy thunder was in the heavens, the lightnings lightened the world, the earth trembled and shook. He thence concludes that God's ways are unsearchable, and that he has purposes of mercy in view, even in the most trying and apparently discouraging dispensations with which his servants are visited—*Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known; and yet thou leddest thy people like a flock, by the hand of Moses and Aaron.* Follow then, distressed sufferer, the Psalmist's example. *The same afflictions are accomplished in thy brethren which are in the world.* The redemption by the Red Sea, and the greater redemption of the mount of Calvary, of which it was a figure, encourage thy hopes. The storm may rage; but the Saviour is in the vessel. God's *footsteps may not be known*, but we know his promise and his love, his faithfulness and his power. Then *why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for thou shalt yet praise him.*

Lastly, in the case of desertion, and indeed in all the preceding cases, the important sug-

gestion is to be made, that RESIGNATION TO GOD'S HOLY WILL must be added to the humble use of all the means of grace. For, *wherefore should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? God's ways are not our ways, nor his thoughts our thoughts.* To reach heaven at last, though under whatever dejection, is infinitely better than a soothing and easy path to hell. Salvation is a blessing inestimably precious. The sorrows of the way to glory, if you be duly exercised by them, and patience has in you its perfect work, will heighten the joy of that ineffable happiness. You are thus preparing for *the inheritance of the saints in light.* God, by his afflictions, may perhaps be humbling you and fitting you for more important services on earth. Only raise your heart to God, and fix your love and humble trust on your Saviour. *All things shall work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to his purpose.* It was the lot even of the Apostles of our Lord, *through much tribulation to enter into the kingdom of heaven.* Wherefore *hold up the hands that hang down and confirm the feeble knees.* For what saith Jehovah to his people? *Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.*

In conclusion, allow me to observe to IRRELIGIOUS PERSONS,

That, though they may amuse themselves and others with the dejection which sincere Christians may endure, yet they have little reason to boast. They are free from religious fears, because they are without religion. The fears of a pious man are frequently ungrounded; but those of an ungodly one, though now they may be repressed, will overtake him at the last with tenfold force. A careless life must lead to a wretched death. To be without the occasional depression to which the true Christian is often liable, might be well. But to be without his repentance, his faith, his love, his hope of heaven, his union with God, indicates a state of extreme and urgent peril. If there is a reasonable fear in the world, the unconverted man has cause to indulge it. His day of punishment is fast approaching; his impenitence and unbelief must be infinitely more displeasing to God than the infirmities and excessive apprehensions of his true servants. Let then the thoughtless person be awakened from his stupidity and seek after God. Let him fly for mercy to a Saviour. Then, and then only, will he be able to judge aright of the religious dejection of those, whom he now perhaps despises and contemns.

SERMON XVI.

THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST.

PHILIPPIANS, II. 2.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.

MAN is better taught by example than by precept. He learns more by seeing another act, than by being told how to act himself. Hence the sincere servants of God are deeply grateful for the perfect model supplied to them by the holy life of their Lord and Saviour. They endeavour to *walk, as he also walked.* They put on the Lord Jesus Christ, in opposition to the making provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof. They learn of Him, who left them an example that they should follow his steps. They aim, as the text expresses it, to have *the same mind in them, which was also in Christ Jesus.* We can scarcely, then, propose a more important subject for our consideration, than the excellencies of our Saviour's personal character. The theme, however, is so copious, that the difficulty lies in the selection of topics. Still

we must consider it in its detail, if we would derive any real benefit for our own conduct. As the ray of light must be divided by means of the prism, before the various colours which are mingled in it to form the perfect white, can be duly observed; so we must examine the separate virtues of our blessed Master, in order to gain a complete conception of the different graces which are united in the perfect whole.

I propose then to notice,

I. Some of the distinct qualities of our Lord's character.

II. The combination and harmonious conjunction of these qualities.

III. The loveliness of the whole, and its suitableness to us as an example.

Let us consider,

I. SOME OF THE DISTINCT QUALITIES OF OUR LORD'S CHARACTER.

We may begin by noticing the extraordinary SPIRIT OF DEVOTION which adorned our blessed Saviour. When twelve years of age, he was engaged in the Temple with the doctors, in his *Father's business*. When he entered on his public ministry, he committed himself in solemn prayer to God. Before he chose his twelve Apostles, as well as at his Transfiguration, he spent a considerable time in devotion. During his ministry he resorted to the synagogue on

the Sabbath. He devoutly referred every act of his life and ministry—his mission, his doctrine, his miracles, his sufferings, his resurrection, to the will and appointment of his Father. He honoured the word of God by reasoning from it, appealing to it, and exhorting his followers and others to search into and obey it. He encouraged a spirit of prayer in his disciples by commanding them to pray, and by supplying them with a model of prayer. He sanctioned these encouragements to prayer by his own example; by *going out into a desert place to pray*, by rising up early, and by *continuing all night in prayer to God*; by pouring out earnest and frequent addresses to his heavenly Father as new exigencies arose; by his solemn intercessory supplication previous to his last sufferings; by his *strong crying and tears* during his agony; and by commending his soul to his Father as he expired on the cross.

His ZEAL, DILIGENCE, AND FORTITUDE, were equally remarkable. He was always in action, always in character, always a teacher, always waiting for opportunities of imparting instruction. He was the same person at the table of Matthew or the Pharisee, as in the synagogue or the temple. The zeal of God's *house eat him up*; and twice did he purge it from the profane uses by which the Jews had defiled it. Such was his ardour of mind, his earnestness,

and determination in his work, that it *was his meat and drink to do the will of Him that sent him*. He neglected even his ordinary food in order to do good. Such was his diligence, that the labours and movements of a long life were crowded, as it were, into the very few years of his public ministry. On one occasion, after teaching, preaching, and healing through one whole day *till the sun was set*, the sacred historian observes that *the next morning, rising up a great while before day, he said unto his disciples, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, for therefore came I forth*. His FORTITUDE, at the same time, was so great, that he reproved his enemies in the most undaunted manner, though they were often the very rulers who had his life in their hands; that he went boldly up to Jerusalem before his disciples, and entered the city in triumph; that he rebuked Peter for wishing his sufferings not to fall on him; and went forth to meet Judas. Before Pilate, Herod, and Caia-phas, he *failed not, neither was discouraged*. And his fortitude had this peculiarity, that he knew beforehand all his sufferings, and therefore had to meet with the whole pain of anticipation, as well as of actual endurance. Man knows nothing certainly of his future afflictions, and is supported by the hope of being exempted

from them; but the eye of Christ pierced through the long melancholy vista before him.

Let us next advert to our Saviour's WISDOM AND PRUDENCE. Nothing was more conspicuous in the character of our Lord than these qualities. He discovered on all occasions a surprising discernment of circumstances and knowledge of the heart. He fulfilled every thing in the most appropriate time and manner. He stopped precisely where he ought, and never pressed beyond the proper limits of duty. He answered, not merely the words of those who addressed themselves to him, but detected and met, as it were, their very thoughts. He taught the disciples his doctrine, and especially that which related to his sufferings, *as they were able to bear it*. He turned every incident, however trivial, to an important purpose. He knew when to yield and *convey himself away*, and when to refute openly his accusers. His parables and discourses are models of profound wisdom and address in the instruction of mankind. Nothing more clearly proves the measure of any one's prudence than proper behaviour and answers on difficult and sudden emergencies. Our Lord was thus tried continually, but he was never taken by surprise; nay, his character was exalted by every such trial. When he was asked by the Pharisees, *Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath-day?* he ap-

pealed to their own understanding and habits, whether any one of them would not pluck an ox or an ass from a pit on that day. When one said, *Master, speak unto my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me*, his reply immediately was, *Man, who made me a judge or a ruler over you? A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth.* In like manner, when he was asked, *if it was lawful to pay tribute unto Cæsar; by what authority he did his miracles; who was a man's neighbour; and, which was the great commandment of the law*, his answers were so full of wisdom, that his adversaries were *astonished, neither durst any one ask him any more questions.*

We may go on to mention the **INDIFFERENCE AND DEADNESS TO THE THINGS OF THE WORLD** which distinguished our blessed Lord. When his disciples showed him the magnificent buildings of the Temple, he expressed none of that admiration which so commonly escapes from us on like occasions. When Satan tempted him with *all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them*, he said, *Get thee hence, Satan; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.* When the people would take him by force and make him a king, he departed into a mountain himself alone. When at the feast of the Pharisee, or at the

marriage in Cana, he was there evidently as a physician to heal his patients. He expressed no commendation of the feast, he accommodated himself to no sinful custom, but employed himself in the instruction of those who were present. There is no vanity, no love of praise or honour, no approach to self-indulgence or intemperance, no regard to personal convenience discoverable in our Master's character; *the foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, but the Son of man had not where to lay his head.* He wrought no one miracle for his own sake. He took no notice in any of his discourses of the affairs and events of states, or of the political circumstances of the Jews. He came into the world poor, unknown, obscure; he lived thirty years in humble privacy; he passed his ministry in contempt and contradiction and reproach; he died in ignominy and baseness: and in doing this he put a blot, if I may use the expression, for ever on the glory of a sinful and deluded world.

The BENEVOLENCE of our Saviour's character need scarcely be noticed. *He went about doing good* to the bodies and souls of men. Kindness marked every part of his conduct. When he saw the young man who was not far from the kingdom of heaven, he loved him. He healed all manner of diseases among the people, even those which the Jews thought the most

afflictive and dreadful. Thus the evidences of his mission were not, like those of Moses, drawn from miraculous calamities inflicted on an offending people, but from benefits conferred on all who applied to him. His love also appeared in taking little children in his arms; in addressing those whom he healed as *sons and daughters*, and in calling his disciples, *not servants but friends*. In a word, his whole life was one great act of benevolence and good-will to man.

We may further observe the HUMILITY AND CONDESCENSION which were apparent in our Master's example. He came *not to be ministered unto, but to minister*. The mind which was in Christ Jesus, to refer particularly to our text, was, that *he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*. Every particular action of his life corresponded with this state of humiliation. He concealed many of his principal miracles, and gave a charge that they should be told to no man. Though he was born in Bethlehem, yet he dwelt so long at Nazareth, as to be called the inhabitant of that mean city, from which no prophet arose. He resolutely opposed every attempt to invest him with worldly honours.

His last act amongst his disciples was to wash their feet, with the express injunction on them to follow his example.

Contemplate also the MEEKNESS which adorned our divine Lord. His language to his disciples was, *Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart*; and St. Paul beseeches the Corinthians *by the meekness and gentleness of Christ*. These were indeed as remarkable, as the dulness of his disciples and the contradiction of the Jews. When his disciples would have called down fire from heaven to consume the city which received him not, he turned gently, and without any reproach said, *Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of*. When the Jews would have stoned him, he meekly asked, *Many good works have I showed you from my Father: for which of these works do ye stone me?* When Simon wondered that he received a woman that was a sinner, he said to him with unruffled calmness, *Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee*; and then delivered the beautiful parable of the two debtors. In short, our Lord's meekness, self-government, regulation of anger, and clemency, were indeed 'without spot' or 'blemish.' He was never disturbed, never irritated, never surprised, never thrown off his guard.

Nor was his PATIENCE less observable. He *suffered for us, leaving us an example that we*

should follow his steps; when he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not. He deeply felt indeed every affliction, as appears from his intense prayers during his agony, but he was perfectly patient and resigned under them. He was *led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before his shearers is dumb, so opened he not his mouth.* During a life of woe and a death of torment, not one impatient word escaped his lips.

With this were united the most lively feelings of COMPASSION. On one occasion we are informed, that *when he saw the multitudes, he had compassion on them: on another, that he had compassion on the people, and taught them many things.* He *sighed deeply in spirit* when the Pharisees asked him a sign from heaven, and was *grieved because of the hardness of their hearts.* Twice the Saviour wept—at the grave of Lazarus, and as he approached the devoted city of Jerusalem. His miracles were continually marked by the tenderest feelings of sympathy and compassion. He raised the only son of the widow of Nain, and himself delivered him to his mother; he raised the only daughter of Jairus, and Lazarus the only brother of Martha and Mary whom he loved. His last discourse with his disciples overflows with compassion. He quite seems to forget his own sufferings which were just about to begin, in order that he may comfort

them. Even on the cross he pitied his disconsolate mother, and commended her to the care of his beloved disciple. Thus *we have not an High Priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*

Of our Lord's FORGIVENESS OF INJURIES, I will only say that his whole life exhibits one scene of reproach and injustice on the part of the Jews, and of forgiveness on his own. Even on the cross, this disposition did not forsake him; but whilst his murderers were in the very act itself of driving the nails into his hands and feet, he prayed, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

Such is a very inadequate specimen of the excellencies of our Saviour's conduct. But a perfect character demands not merely the assemblage of distinct excellencies, but their harmonious conjunction and union.

Let us therefore consider,

II. THE COMBINATION AND HARMONIOUS CONJUNCTION OF THESE QUALITIES IN THE CHARACTER OF OUR LORD.

This may indeed be inferred from the consideration of the separate excellencies of our Saviour's conduct, and especially from the wisdom which adorned them all; but the point is so important as to deserve a distinct notice.

Nothing is so rare or so difficult as the combination of the various duties and graces which constitute the Christian character ; and yet it is in this combination that the evidence of a real change of heart principally lies. There are some dispositions of mind and some duties which are, from our natural temperament, our age, our station, and our circumstances, so natural and easy to us, as scarcely to be deemed distinct marks of our regeneration. In fact they are often little more than apparent virtues ; they vanish with every change of circumstances, they give way to selfish and excessive passions, and even decline into the positive correspondent vices, unless they are checked and balanced by the opposite, and to us more difficult, graces and duties, which should accompany and guard them.

Now, in our divine Master, there was the most perfect combination of every excellency. All he preached and required from others, he practised himself. He united all that became the Mediator and Lord of heaven and earth, with all that became Him who, for our sakes, was *a worm and no man*. He reconciled the most remote and discordant qualities. When asserting his authority and summoning all the world to his tribunal, he spake with an inexpressible dignity and majesty : on other occasions he was the most humble and meek of

men. Even under all his sufferings and ignominy, there shone forth a superiority and greatness of mind, which confounded his enemies. He displayed also the utmost tenderness and mildness, and yet the most unyielding boldness and fortitude. His meekness did not degenerate into apathy, mere easiness of temper, timidity, or indifference, like that of Eli or Jehoshaphat. Nor did his boldness become fierce and ungovernable. There was in him that union of opposite virtues, which constitutes a perfect character: whilst others have virtues of one description only. All was in order, all in proportion, all from principle, all in harmony.

He combined, in like manner, the most exuberant compassion to sinners with the greatest hatred of sin; the most exquisite sensibility, with a perfect command of his feelings; the purest spirituality of mind, with a consideration of all the minute wants and circumstances of his hearers; the highest love to the souls of men, with the most affectionate regard to their bodies; the most complete superiority to the world, with a respectful submission to authorities ecclesiastical and civil; an entire separation from the follies and sins of mankind, without a trait of austerity or misanthropy; the most faithful reproof of the vices of the Pharisees and Scribes, with a due attention to their stations, and a moderation which never over-

stated an argument, or outraged unnecessarily the feelings of his opponents.

This constitutes no small part of the excellency of our Lord's character. Christians can readily follow their Master in some one branch of these graces. We can be compassionate; but then we are so candid as to countenance sin. We can show a lively sensibility of affection; but then we fall under its power and are subdued. We can be spiritually minded; but then we are not so willing to attend to the minor details of ordinary duty. We could not, for instance, have washed the disciples' feet, or entered the mean abode of poverty, or have gone into the publican's house to instruct him. We can express great tenderness for the bodies of men, but we leave their souls, comparatively speaking, to perish. Or we may profess a love to their souls, but we contribute sparingly and reluctantly to relieve the pains and sufferings of our common nature. We can express a contempt for the world; but then we at the same time fall into sin by doing it in a cynical, inconsistent, covetous, censorious, pharisaical spirit. We can defend the truth; but with the zeal of a partizan, and without sufficient respect for the persons or opinions of our adversaries. Thus we follow our own turn of mind with some sincerity of religious feeling, and without perhaps any great faults; but we are far from imitat-

ing, or attempting to imitate, the combination of virtues which appeared in our Saviour. We lean with all our weight on one side. We think it some excuse that our inclination and turn of mind has a peculiar bias; whereas we should study our Lord's character in order expressly to copy those parts of it to which our natural dispositions would least attract us. In this way we shall unite, as our Lord did, all the milder virtues with all the more firm and intrepid ones; we shall display the graces of the contemplative life with the efforts of the active—an union which may be said to comprise the whole compass of our obedience to God.

“Never was a character,” says Archbishop Newcombe, “at the same time so commanding and natural, so resplendent and pleasing, so amiable and venerable as that of Christ. There is a peculiar contrast in it between an awful dignity and majesty, and the most engaging loveliness, tenderness, and softness. He now converses with prophets, lawgivers, and angels; and the next instant he meekly endures the dullness of his disciples and the blasphemies and rage of the multitude. He now calls himself greater than Solomon, one who can command legions of angels, the giver of life to whomsoever he will, the Son of God who shall sit on his glorious throne to judge the world; at other times we see him embracing young children, not

lifting up his voice in the streets, not breaking the bruised reed, nor quenching the smoking flax, calling his disciples, not servants, but friends and brethren, and comforting them with an exuberant and parental affection. Let us pause an instant, and fill our minds with the idea of one who knew all things heavenly and earthly, searched and laid open the inmost recesses of the heart, rectified every prejudice and removed every mistake of a moral and religious kind, by a word exercised a sovereignty over all nature, penetrated the hidden events of futurity, gave promises of admission into a happy immortality, had the keys of life and death, claimed an union with the Father; and yet was pious, mild, gentle, humble, affable, social, benevolent, friendly, affectionate. Such a character is fairer than the morning-star. Each separate virtue is made stronger by opposition and contrast; and the union of so many virtues forms a brightness which fitly represents the glory of that God who is invisible, who dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen nor can see."

These reflections will prepare us for considering,

III. THE LOVELINESS OF THE WHOLE OF OUR SAVIOUR'S CHARACTER, AND ITS SUITABLENESS TO US AS AN EXAMPLE.

Our Lord's life was as LOVELY AND NATURAL, as it was excellent in all other respects. This might indeed be collected from our preceding remarks; but we must stop to consider it still more attentively, as it forms a very peculiar feature of the whole example of our Master. Every thing is artless and attractive in the Redeemer's conduct. There is no attempt to support a part by labour and effort, no exhibition of a few splendid acts on extraordinary occasions, no seclusion from the ordinary habits of mankind; but all is familiar, gentle, and practicable. Jesus Christ took upon him human nature as it came from the hands of its Maker, and did not, like the Stoics, attempt to fashion it anew, except so far as sin had corrupted it. "His piety," observes a great author*, "was without affrightment of precedent or prodigious instances of actions greater than the imitation of men. The instances of it were actions of a very holy, but of an ordinary life; and we may observe this difference in the story of Jesus from ecclesiastical writings of certain beatified persons, whose lives are told rather to amaze us and to create scruples, than to lead us in the evenness and security of a holy conscience." The amiableness and naturalness, if I may use the word, which appear in all that our Lord

* Bishop Jeremy Taylor.

said and did, on all occasions, in every emergency, and before all persons, form a striking contrast to the ostentation and glare of merely human virtue. Christ's life is not one of mere justice and greatness, but of overflowing grace and benignity. He speaks of the supernatural truths and glories of heaven with as much ease as we do of the usual affairs of life. He is familiar with every subject he touches. Nothing is overstrained or artificial; nothing above nature and common life. Simplicity and majesty are equally conspicuous in him; and are both adorned with a loveliness which affects and wins the heart.

Such an example was EMINENTLY SUITABLE in this, as well as in other respects, to us in our state of infirmity and conflict. We all feel the advantage of a pattern for our direction. But where was a suitable one to be found? Amongst men there are no perfect models; in the best there are things to be shunned as well as imitated. Neither is the character of the Almighty a sufficient exemplar; for though we are to be *followers of God as dear children*, yet God is infinite, his glory is dazzling, we know not where to fix our minds, we cannot come to our own particular case of conflict and weakness. Shall we, then, imitate angels? Yes; but still their example does not reach our wants. They have no enemies, no temptations, no self-denial, no

combat. We can no more emulate the seraphic piety of angels, than we can ascend the heavens with the morning lark. It is in our incarnate Lord alone that every thing is lovely and engaging, every thing suited to our weak and frail state. Christ had our infirmities, he bore our conflict; like us he was tempted, and like us he felt suffering to be difficult even to a holy mind. This is an example brought down as near to us as possible, and exactly suited to our frailty and weakness. We behold in it the image of God, and can contemplate the divine character as the sun through a glass, which softens, without really diminishing, its glory.

Again, our Lord's example is not that of a warrior, or a statesman, or a scholar, or a noble. It is not a character rarely seen, and therefore adapted only to the imitation of a very small part of mankind, but it is one of daily occurrence; and conversant, not only with the things of heaven, but also with the most common incidents of life. It is surprising how little there is of our Lord's conduct which is not imitable. His retirement in the wilderness for forty days, and his denunciations on the Scribes and Pharisees, together with his miracles, are almost the only exceptions.

Besides, the very circumstances of poverty and suffering in which he appeared, make his example still more adapted for us, situated as

we are in a world of sorrow, where the immense majority of mankind are suffered by Divine Providence to remain in dependence and subordination to others. Our Lord is an example of suffering virtue. He exhibits what is most wanted, the milder and more lovely and retired and patient graces.

Our Saviour, further, is our most suitable example, as he was both a public and domestic teacher, and thus instructs the ministers of God's word and sacraments, and the parents and guides of youth in every age, in their most important and difficult duties. What inimitable beauty is there in our Lord's discourses and parables! What simplicity, and yet what force! He is not an abstract systematic teacher. He enters upon no long trains of reasoning. He illustrates spiritual truths by images the most familiar and the most striking. He draws the best lessons from incidental objects and occasions. He adorns his discourses with those simple beauties which are most easily retained in the memory, and most deeply penetrate the heart.

I only add, that our Lord's blessed life is a most suitable, because it is a most endearing example. We cannot separate, and wish not to separate, from it the thought that this perfect pattern of virtue was exhibited in the adorable and mysterious Person, who became man, and

took upon him the form of a servant for our salvation. This makes our blessed Master's life the most engaging example, because it adds to it all the most powerful motives of gratitude and love. Nay, the additional reflection that the very graces which we imitate formed a part of that *obedience unto death, that righteousness which is upon all and unto all them that believe*, serves to give it an inexpressible attraction.

From the whole, then, of this subject, let us learn,

I. HOW FAR MAN IS FALLEN FROM GOD. Man would have perfectly resembled this picture which we have drawn of Christ, if he had not departed from original righteousness. Now, as the law is the ministry of condemnation, as well as the standard of duty, so the adorable Saviour, the image of God, is to be exhibited in all his holiness, not only as our example, if we are true Christians, but to humble us and convince us of sin, if we are not. The life of Christ shows us what man was, when created in the divine image, and what he still would be, if he were not corrupted and depraved. And yet if we look around us, either in our own families or in the world at large, what a contrast do we see to this admirable pattern! What impiety and irreligion! What coldness to God and timidity in duty! What folly and impetu-

osity in our own selfish pursuits! What admiration and love of the sinful practices, and pleasures, and company, and maxims of the world! What unkindness, pride, severity, impatience, wrath, anger, evil speaking, revenge, cruelty! Where is the piety, zeal, wisdom, indifference to the world, benevolence, meekness, patience, compassion, and forgiveness of injuries which adorned the Master whose name we profess to bear? I do not proceed to ask where is the union and harmony of all virtues, or their loveliness and naturalness, because, if men have not the separate graces of our Lord, they cannot pretend to the combined beauty of the whole. Let each irreligious person, then, compare his heart and life with the example of the Son of God. Let him pray for the illumination of the Holy Ghost, to show him both himself and his Saviour. Let him thus learn his fall, his condemnation, and his danger, and his need of repentance, pardon, and a new principle of holy obedience.

This subject may teach us,

II. THE NECESSITY OF SALVATION BY GRACE.

For if the conduct of our Lord Christ be only a transcript of the divine law which we are bound to obey, and if we are so far from being like that example, that in fact we are by nature directly contrary to it; then *by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in God's sight*; then it is impossible that we should be saved by

our own works and deservings. We are in truth transgressors of the holy law, and therefore can never be justified by it. We must then fly to the divine mercy. We must renounce the vain and presumptuous attempt of *establishing our own righteousness, and must submit ourselves to the righteousness of God*. Whilst men compare themselves only with each other, or substitute the corrupt standard of the world for the unalterable law of God, and are thus ignorant as well of the rule of duty as of their own hearts, it is no wonder that they stand upon their supposed merits and resist the doctrines of grace. But if they once come to know themselves and the holy life of their Saviour, and will honestly, and as in the presence of God, examine their hearts and lives by that perfect rule of virtue, they will gradually discover their extreme guilt and depravity, they will learn to welcome, and to glory in, the salvation which they now misunderstand and despise: and justification by faith in the Redeemer, and in his righteousness, imputed to them without the deeds of the law, will appear a blessing infinitely desirable and suitable; and in fact the only blessing by which their deplorable misery can be relieved.

We learn,

III. ON WHAT FOUNDATION THE DOCTRINE OF THE NEW BIRTH STANDS. For, if men, besides

being pardoned, must be made like to Christ, in order to obey God here and enjoy him hereafter, then they must have a change of heart, they must undergo an entire spiritual and radical alteration, a renewal in the spirit of their minds, a birth of the Holy Ghost. For a fallen corrupt creature to love God with his whole heart, to hate every sin, to copy the example of his divine Saviour, and imitate the lovely tempers and life of the Son of God, there must be a new birth, a holy bias of nature implanted, an internal principle of life, a heavenly tendency of the heart and affection, in a word, that secret but powerful work of the blessed Spirit by which the eyes are gradually opened, the determination of the will altered, the heart purified, and the life changed: The spring of all holiness and real virtue is the regeneration of heart by the Holy Ghost. Let, then, the sinner who is sensible that his character is far from resembling that of his Saviour, implore this gift of divine grace, that he may be *born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever.* This, and this only, will effectually lead him to repentance for sin, to faith in the merits of his Saviour, and to the really transcribing of his holy example; that is, it will produce, what nothing else can, true practical godliness in his

heart and life, and the actual imitation of our Lord's Spirit and conduct.

IV. Lastly, the Christian may collect from this subject, HOW MUCH HE HAS STILL TO LEARN AND TO DO. *Whom God did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son*, is the emphatic language of the Apostle. But how defective is our resemblance to this image! It is begun, indeed, if we are real Christians, in the incipient transformation of the heavenly birth. But much, much remains unaccomplished. Let us, then, study more intensely than we have ever yet done, the example of our Lord. Let us occasionally devote a given time—a month for instance—for a more express meditation on the striking excellencies of our Saviour's conduct. Let us improve especially for this purpose the various solemn days appointed by our church to commemorate the different actions of his life. Let us deliberately apply ourselves to the imitation of his piety and zeal; his fortitude and wisdom; his deadness to the world, his benevolence, his meekness, his patience, his compassion, his forgiveness of injuries. Nor must we stop here. A Christian should especially study that union and combination of graces and duties which appeared in his divine Master. Here, here lies the chief labour and work of a follower of Christ. Consistency is the evidence of advanced and solid religion.

On separate points we may be deceived, but the entire harmony and consistency of Christian virtues can never mislead us in the judgment we form of our own character. Let us sit down, then, to this matchless picture, let us fill our minds with its beauties, and then copy it touch by touch. More especially let us follow those parts of the example which we should naturally be most ready to omit. Above all, let our character be amiable and natural; let our religion be easy and engaging; let us implore more fervently the grace of the Holy Spirit to assist us; let us acknowledge with shame our continual defects; let us rely on the atonement of our Lord for pardon and acceptance before God: and let us eagerly desire the time, when *we shall be perfect, as our Father which is in heaven is perfect*, and be like our Saviour, because *we shall see him as he is*.

SERMON XVII.

THE FORCE OF HABIT.

JEREMIAH, XIII. 23.

Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.

SUCH are the emphatic words in which the force of evil habit is described by the inspired Prophet. The sinner, drawn on by a long course of transgression, and involved in the labyrinth and toils of corrupt usage, becomes at length hardened and incorrigible. *A deceived heart turns him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?* It cannot fail, therefore, of being a most important subject to endeavour to trace out something of the process by which men arrive at this fearful state, to describe the general nature of our habits as moral and accountable beings, to give a specimen of the various dangers to which they expose us, and to warn those of their peril, who are insensibly advancing to the brink

of the precipice. I therefore propose to enter on the subject in the present discourse; with the design, under the divine blessing, of awakening the secure and careless sinner from his fatal lethargy, of enforcing on him the necessity of an immediate and thorough conversion, and of showing the extent and magnitude of that work of almighty grace, by which the habits of sin and sensuality are made to give place to those of Christian obedience and holiness. Let us then consider,

I. The nature of our habits generally.

II. The consequences arising from sinful habits in our fallen state.

III. The extent and magnitude of that conversion to God which is therefore necessary.

We notice,

I. THE NATURE OF OUR HABITS GENERALLY.

Habit is an aptitude or disposition of mind or body acquired by the frequent repetition of the same act. What we have done once, we do a second time with more ease and readiness. As we become accustomed to the performance of any action, we have a proneness to repeat it on like occasions, the ideas connected with it being always at hand to lead us on and direct us; so that it requires a particular effort to forbear it, but to do it demands often no conscious act of the will at all. This sensibility to the

power of habit is a part of our original constitution as framed by our Creator, for the wisest and most beneficent purposes. We are formed to contract a facility and bias by use and exercise. To describe, indeed, the phenomena of this remarkable principle of our nature fully and in detail, would be difficult ; but its general features are sufficiently obvious.

Habits of body are produced by repeated external acts, as agility, gracefulness, dexterity in the mechanical arts. Thus the arm of the labourer is hardened for toil, and the hand of the mechanic is practised for skill: the racer acquires his swiftness, and the wrestler his strength. Habits of mind are formed by the repeated exertion of the intellectual faculties, or the inward practical principles. Thus the powers of apprehension, memory, imagination, reason, attention, acquire force in proportion as they are exercised. Hence the advances of man in the finer arts and the more profound sciences ; the triumphs of the scholar or the metaphysician over the most difficult departments of literature or philosophy ; the commanding ascendancy of the orator or the statesman over the feelings, the affections, and the opinions of mankind. To the class of mental habits belong the moral virtues, as obedience, charity, patience, industry, submission to law, self-government, the love of truth. The inward

practical principles of these qualities, being repeatedly called into exertion, and acted upon, become habits of virtue : just as, on the other hand, envy, malice, pride, revenge, the love of money, the love of the world, when carried into act, gradually form habits of vice.

Habit is in its own nature therefore indifferent to vice or virtue. If man had continued in his original righteousness, it would have been, what the merciful Creator designed it to be, a source of unspeakable moral strength and improvement. Every step in virtue would have secured further advances. The understanding would have proceeded to unlimited degrees of light, to extraordinary quickness of perception, and correctness of judgment ; the will would constantly have been directed by truth and goodness ; the affections would progressively and indefinitely have increased in purity, fervour, and expansiveness ; the appetites would have obeyed and followed the superior faculties ; whilst the body, trained and strengthened by habitual temperance, would ever have proved the active and ready minister of the virtues of the soul.

To what point man might at length have reached by the effect of use and experience thus acting on faculties made for enlargement, it is impossible to say, and it is vain to inquire. For we are lost creatures. *Woe unto us, the crown*

is fallen from our head, for we have sinned. We are born in sin, and shapen in iniquity. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Every imagination of the thoughts of our hearts is only evil continually.

The power of habit, like every other faculty and power of man, is, now, in almost every instance, *the instrument of unrighteousness*. We are prone to commit sin, and every act of it only disposes us to renewed transgression. Thus *all flesh has corrupted its way upon the earth*. Men begin with a single crime; it is repeated; it becomes, first easy, then natural, then necessary. Thus they go on still in their wickedness. Step by step, they descend the fatal declivity, and with increasing speed. Till at length, *the Ethiopian*, to speak with the text, *might as easily change his skin or the leopard his spots, as they do good*, without the operation of divine grace, *who are accustomed to do evil*.

The force of these evil habits lies much in the gradual and almost imperceptible manner in which they are acquired. No man becomes reprobate at once. The sinner at first has difficulties. Shame, conscience, education, motives of religion, example, the unreasonableness of vice, the immediate evil consequences of it in various ways, God's judgments on sinners, alarming events in his providence, the admonitions of friends and the warnings of ministers, are all

barriers to the inundation. But habits, insensibly formed, sap the embankment. The powerful current works its way, and all opposing hinderances are carried before it.

It is, indeed, true, that habit, in many cases, diminishes the enjoyment derived from sin. The sense of vicious pleasure is palled by indulgence. But unhappily the same indulgence which lessens the pleasure, increases the vicious propensity. Philosophers have remarked it as a curious circumstance in the economy of our nature, that the continued practice of any virtue or vice, while it weakens what they call the *passive principle* of that virtue or vice, strengthens its *active principle* in the same degree. Thus, the practice of visiting and relieving the sick or the distressed, greatly impairs the feeling of pain with which we at first contemplate sights of wretchedness; but, at the same time, the practice itself becomes more and more habitual; and, though our sympathy may be less acute, it is more active. The case is exactly the same with the practice of vice. A course of debauchery, for example, deadens the sense of pleasure, but increases the desire of gratification. The passive principle is in some degree worn away, but the active principle is invigorated. Drunkenness, again, destroys the sensibility of the palate, but strengthens the habit of intemperance. A con-

tinued course of impiety and profaneness lessens the lamentable pleasure which the scoffer originally felt in insulting religion, but confirms him in the practical rebellion against its laws. A continued course of worldliness and irreligion, takes off from the zest and relish of worldly pursuits, but augments the difficulty of renouncing them. They are become joyless; but are still followed from a sort of sad necessity. Thus is it that this singular principle in the constitution of man, originally intended for his confirmation in virtue and all godliness, now only serves to fix and root him in his disobedience. *The things which should have been for his peace, are become unto him an occasion of falling.* The wonderful contrivance of the beneficent Creator in the fabric of the rational mind, is now, through its apostacy, become the source of a fearful, a seductive, and a degrading captivity*.

Let us, then, attempt to trace out these general remarks in their application to a few particular instances, whilst we consider,

II. THE CONSEQUENCES ARISING FROM CORRUPT HABITS, IN OUR FALLEN STATE.

* See Bishop Butler's Analogy; Archbishop Tillotson on Jer. xiii. 23; Bishop Horsley on Phil. iii. 15; Stewart on the Mind; Dr. Paley on 1 Cor. ix. 27; and Dr. Johnson's Vision of Theodore, Works, vol. ii. p. 408, edition 1816, 12mo.

The consequences, in one word, are, that we become *hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*. Any one transgression, if habitual, excludes from the kingdom of heaven, and every transgression is in the way of speedily becoming so: here lies the danger. Like Sampson in the lap of Dalilah, we first fall asleep, and then are fast bound, as it were, in the cords of our iniquities.

To elucidate this observation, let us consider, first, AN EXTREME CASE. Look at yonder criminal, whose hands have violated the property, and perhaps been imbrued in the life, of his fellow-creature. *His conscience is seared as with a hot iron. Is he ashamed when he commits abomination? nay, he is not at all ashamed, neither can he blush.* What has brought him hither? What has transformed the meek and decent and reputable youth into the fierce and vindictive ruffian? Evil habits. He began with breaking the Sabbath; this led to wicked company; drunkenness followed, and brought every other sin in its train—lust, passion, malice, desperation, cruelty, bloodshed. The road, dreadful as it seems to us, was easy to him. One bad habit prepared for the following. Satan was active with his temptations. The victim yielded by degrees; till all the means of moral culture were trampled under foot, and all the incentives to vice and profligacy greedily and

habitually sought for and admitted. A more frightful spectacle of what a sinner may become, when the capacity of improvement in virtue has been thoroughly perverted to a progress in vice, and when the entire process is completed by the influence of wicked example and the force of temptation, cannot, I think, be contemplated. I mention such an instance first, because it is a startling one, and calculated to rouse the attention to the general force of habit in fallen man. But my design is, not to dwell on a picture too shocking for a calm consideration; but to point out the danger of the same principle in cases by far more common and less suspected; and where the fatal effects of sinful customs in hardening the heart against the calls of grace and duty, are less conspicuous perhaps at first sight, but not less fatal to the conversion and salvation of the soul.

For what can account for that SOBER AND MEASURED SYSTEM OF SENSUAL INDULGENCE in which the great mass of mankind live, but habit working on the fallen state of man? How is it that an immortal creature, gifted with reason and destined for heaven, can go on secure in gratifying all those earthly passions, which he once well knew to be inconsistent with a state of grace; but which he now pursues, forgetful of God and religion? He eats and drinks, he obeys appetite, he pursues vanity, he lives to

pleasure. All that his eye covets, he endeavours to obtain. He is restrained indeed by civil usages, by the laws of his country, by the laws of honour, by a regard to his health, by some sense of moral character; but his real governing object is still the world, amusement, company, folly. And how is all this? What has made him morally insensible to the obligations of holiness, purity, and the love of God? The habit to which he has resigned himself. The effect has not been brought about at once. The desire for indolent and sensual gratification has increased with indulgence. Every day his resolutions for serving God have become weaker, and his practical subjugation to an earthly life has been confirmed. He has lost almost all notions of spiritual religion and self-government. He moves mechanically. He has little actual relish even for his most favourite pleasures; but they are necessary to him. He is the slave of the animal part of his frame. He vegetates rather than lives. Habit has become a second nature. *Wide is the gate and broad is the way which leadeth to destruction.*

But there arise from this class of persons two other classes, which stop not in the decencies that control those of whom we have been speaking — THE DRUNKARD AND THE IMPURE. Perhaps there are no cases where habit more obviously and fatally blinds and destroys man.

Few persons intend to become either the one or the other of these characters. They yield, perhaps unwillingly at first, to the sin. They submit to pressing solicitations. They reflect on the crime, when committed, with horror. They determine to avoid the repetition of it. The next temptation, however, finds them an easier conquest than before. The imagination begins contentedly to tamper with the iniquity. The dread of it is lessened, the inclination increased. The custom begins to be formed. Each attack of the vice meets them, not where they began at first, but in the spot and with the temper in which the last commission of it left them. Thus imperceptibly the act becomes a course, and the course an inveterate habit. *Their eyes are full of adultery, and they cannot cease from sin. Their very mind and conscience is defiled.* Ineffectual efforts at amendment only leave them in closer bondage. Alarms seize the conscience. Still they follow on, *as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks. They have stricken me, they say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not; when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.*

If we turn from this description of persons, and view the force of habit in multitudes of those who are engaged in THE AFFAIRS OF TRADE AND COMMERCE, OR IN THE PROSECUTION OF RE-

SPECTABLE PROFESSIONS, we need only ask what can account for the practical object of their lives? I suppose them to be exempt from a direct course of sensual indulgence, and from the vices to which it too often leads. But are not spiritual obedience to God, and faith in the sacrifice of Christ, quite out of their thoughts? Are not their earliest and their latest hours occupied in the things of this world? Are not their cares and projects limited to the earth? Do not the customs of trade or the usages of a profession often clash with, often supersede, the laws of God? Why else is the Sabbath so commonly violated? Why are nefarious or doubtful practices so frequently countenanced? Why are precarious speculations so eagerly embraced? Why are the aggrandizement of a family, the amassing of riches, the gratification of ambition, so openly pursued? And how does it arrive that this sort of spirit pervades so many thousands around us? It is their habit. It is the force of custom and the influence of the circle in which they move. The operation has been gradual. The syren by her fascinating arts has first decoyed and then entangled her captives. They came by degrees within the magic charm, and are now fixed and bound to earth and its concerns.

Again, notice for a moment the intellectual habits of MANY OF THE SCHOLARS AND PHILOSO-

PHERS OF OUR AGE. *The world by wisdom knows not God.* The pride of our corrupted hearts readily forms the properly intellectual or reasoning part of our nature to habits, as ensnaring and as fatal, as any which have their seat more directly in the bodily appetites. If once the inquisitive student resigns himself to a daring curiosity, and applies to the simple and majestic truths of revelation the sort of argumentation which may safely be employed in natural inquiries, he is in imminent peril of scepticism and unbelief. The mind comes within a dangerous influence. *Knowledge puffeth up.* Truth reaches not the proud. Such men are incapable of discerning it. They no longer feel the right impression of moral evidence. An impiety which can venture to dispute the plainest doctrines of the Inspired Volume, secretly gains possession of the soul. Reason usurps the province of faith. The obstacles which such a state of mind opposes to an ingenuous and cordial reception of Christianity, I need not stop to point out. A young and superficial reader once fixed in a habit of this sort, comes at last either tacitly to explain away the fundamental doctrines of the Holy Trinity, of the fall, of human corruption, of redemption, and the work of the Holy Ghost; or openly to sacrifice them to the madness of infidelity, or to the scarcely less pernicious errors of the Socinian heresy.

And whence is all this? Habit, working on a corrupt nature, has produced it, confirmed it, rivetted it. Habit is as fruitful and as fatal a cause of intellectual disorder as of merely animal or sensual depravation.

What, again, seduces the MERE EXTERNAL WORSHIPPER OF GOD to withhold from his Maker his heart, whilst he insults him with a lifeless service of the lips? What, but the surprising and unsuspected influence of evil habit? He knows that the Almighty sees every thing. He is aware that *God is a spirit, and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth.* He cannot but acknowledge that outward ceremonies, though important in their place and for their due end, yet, if destitute of that fervent and humble devotion which should be their animating principle, are nothing less than a mockery of God, and abominable in his sight. And yet he proceeds in a heartless round of religious duties—a compensation for sinful indulgences,—a purchase-money reluctantly paid,—a mere lifeless shadow of piety. This he has so long allowed himself to offer to the Almighty, that at last his mind is unconscious of the impiety of which he is guilty. A habit of formality and ceremonial observance, with a practical, and perhaps at length an avowed, opposition to the grace of true religion as converting and sanctifying the whole soul, has darkened even his judgment.

All is gross and earthly ; and a worldly life is tacitly reconciled with a Christian name and profession.

Nor can I forbear to add that the GENERAL INDIFFERENCE TO PRACTICAL RELIGION, which prevails in our age, may be traced back in a great measure to the same cause. Men are so accustomed to put off the concerns of their salvation, and to disregard really spiritual religion, that they at length learn to draw a regular and well-defined line between merely decent and reputable persons, and those who lead a seriously religious life ; and to proscribe the latter as extravagant and hypocritical. Men proceed satisfied with such a practical indifference to the infinite value of their souls, as would be quite impossible to every reasonable mind, if a fatal perseverance in the course had not made it habitual. What ! could it be possible for them to admit, as they do, their immortality and accountableness, the holiness of God's law, the awful sanction of eternal death suspended on the violation of it, and their actual state of guilt as sinners, and yet be insensible, and yet lay aside all habitual regard to religion ? What ! could they walk, as they do, on the borders of the grave, observe the uncertainty of life, witness the sicknesses and deaths of persons younger and stronger than themselves, and see that men generally die as they have lived,

and yet still pass on in the journey of life careless and unconcerned? What! could the world acknowledge the necessity of repentance and faith in Christ and a new life, and the importance of attending to these duties without delay, and the almost impossibility of attending to them on a death-bed, and yet put off from year to year the pressing and indispensable concern? What inconsistency is here! What absurd conduct! What thoughtlessness! What presumption! What madness! Do men act thus in their temporal concerns, in those which regard their health, their property, and their worldly interests? No. The same person who puts off every thing as to eternity, will hazard nothing as to time, will seize every advantage, will begin without an instant's delay, will watch every favourable circumstance, will forego no single advantage. What then can account for his pursuing a conduct so totally different, in concerns so incomparably more momentous? It is his natural corruption, strengthened by habit, which has blinded, and which leads him captive. He has acted on temporal interests, till he has forgotten eternal. Men around him shut their eyes to future realities. He only does the same. He is quite easy and undisturbed in his state. If any thing threatens to break in on this security of mind, he avoids it as an enemy. He chooses his own ways, and

will walk after the imaginations of his evil heart. He does not fear to impose on God and on himself; though at times he more than suspects that the hour will come when he will be awakened to his mistake, and will find it irrecoverable.

But the time will not admit of our pursuing this important part of our subject into all the details of which it is capable. I will therefore, my brethren, leave to your individual reflections, the further application of the general principles that have been laid down; and will proceed to consider,

III. THE EXTENT AND MAGNITUDE OF THAT CONVERSION TO GOD WHICH IS THEREFORE NECESSARY.

For the separate examples of corrupt habits which have been adduced, are only so many particular specimens of the general state of man. Perverted habits universally prevail; and they have altered our depraved nature, but have altered it still for the worse. The facility which is acquired in any kind of action by the repetition of it, remains as the law of the human frame; but is become through our moral depravity the instrument of our ruin. Men indeed often complain of habit, as if it were something external, and which irresistibly enslaves them; but the complaint is unreasonable. The fault is in man himself, if a prin-

ciple conferred on him for his good, becomes the occasion of his destruction. This is the case here. Men are almost infinitely different from each other in their particular pursuits, objects, tastes, sentiments, characters; but they all agree in this, that they are carried along by the current of evil habits. Some are profligate and some more decent; some are high in station and some low; some are skilful and learned, and some ignorant; some are proud, and some covetous; some are mean, and some ambitious; some have a pretence of piety, and some are openly irreligious: but ALL by nature forget God, love the world, depend on their own understanding, follow the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and neglect the concerns of their salvation. All have the *carnal mind*, all the unenlightened and dark understanding, all the hard heart, all the *death in trespasses and sins*. Much of this consists in what we are now considering. Men acquire an aptness, a readiness, a pleasure in their sinful pursuits. Inveterate habits are thus insensibly formed. The reasons for the unlawful indulgence offer themselves to their thoughts on all occasions, and each time with increased force and persuasiveness. Thus God and Christ and spiritual religion are systematically, though sometimes imperceptibly, excluded, and men proceed in a worldly or a wicked state of the affections,

pursuits, and conduct ; whilst every step makes their sinful career more natural, and lessens the counteracting influence of conscience and duty.

What then can turn and renew man, lying, as he does, in such a condition ? His sins are not acts, but symptoms ; not separate transgressions, but habits ; not mistakes, but designs ; not casual or incidental circumstances, but the constant and direct course of life. *The very light which is in him is darkness.* A state of sin and a state of holiness are not like two ways running parallel by each other, and just parted by a line, so that a man may step out of the one into the other ; but like two diverging roads to totally opposite places, which recede from each other as they go on, and lead the respective travellers further and further apart every step. What then is to bring man back to God ? What to break the force of custom ? What to change all the intellectual habits and social usages of the sinner ? What to set him at war with himself, to make him strive against the very bent and inclination of his soul, to induce him to lay violent hands, as it were, on his own tempers and course of conduct, and to fight with the man with whom he was in concord before ? What is to stop him in his rushing down the precipice ? What to awaken him in his profound lethargy ? What to be the

starting-post of a new race? What the principle of a new life? What the motive, the master-motive, of a thorough and radical moral alteration?

There never was, there never can be, any other effectual method proposed for these high purposes, but that which the Scriptures reveal, AN ENTIRE CONVERSION OF THE WHOLE SOUL TO GOD BY THE MIGHTY OPERATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. *We must be born again.* If ever we are saved, it must be by *the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost*, not merely in the sense in which, in the judgment of charity, it may be contended that we have been regenerated in baptism, but in the full and plenary meaning of the expression, by an actual work of new-creating power upon our hearts, giving a right direction to the understanding, infixing a holy impression upon the affections, communicating a right disposition and bias to the will, and thus actually *working in us to will and to do of God's good pleasure.*

This mighty revolution must take place in all without exception who are living a sinful and irreligious life, whatever difference there may be in such persons as to their external character in the world, and their freedom from gross and scandalous crimes. The commencement of this change is frequently imperceptible,

and its progress commonly gradual; nor is it to be confounded with the wild and dangerous pretensions of mystics or enthusiasts. It is in every case to be judged of by the solid and real fruits of repentance, faith, and new obedience, which it produces. But it constitutes the real turning point in religion. Nothing can break up confirmed habits of sinful indulgence in a fallen creature like man, but a radical and powerful transformation of the heart. There may be some admission of truth in the judgment, there may be some convictions of an alarmed conscience, there may be some cursory thoughts on the theory of religion, there may be some feeble attempts at amendment, where there is no real conversion. But all this is nothing. "The going over the theory of virtue," says Bishop Butler, "in one's thoughts, talking well, and drawing fine pictures of it; this is so far from necessarily or certainly conducing to form an habit of it in him who thus employs himself, that it may harden the mind in a contrary course, and render it gradually more insensible to all moral considerations."

God alone that created the heart, can renew it after his image. When the soul receives this new and holy bias, then the evil habits in which men formerly lived, will resolutely be relinquished, and other and better habits will succeed. They will then repent of sin and separate from

it. The *easily besetting iniquity* will be cast aside; the *offending right hand cut off, the offending right eye plucked out*. They will come out from the world and its practices. They will mourn from the bottom of their hearts over the courses of iniquity in which they before indulged themselves. They will watch and pray against temptation. They will believe in the inestimable promises of life in Jesus Christ, trusting alone in his merits, and renouncing their imagined *righteousness which was of the law*. They will depend exclusively on the graces and influences of the Holy Spirit for every good thought and every holy action. Thus they will stop at once in the course of their former habits, and begin to form new ones. They will now enter on a life of humility and fear, of conscientiousness and circumspection, of mortification and purity, of meekness and temperance, of justice and charity; all springing from faith in the atonement of Christ, and from a genuine love to his name.

Such are the extent and magnitude of true conversion. This is indeed fitly described, in the emphatic language of sacred Scripture, as *a birth from above, a regeneration of the Holy Ghost, an awakening from sleep, a turning from darkness unto light, a new creation, a resurrection from the dead, a translation from the*

power of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear Son.

But, having now considered the general nature of habit, the consequences arising from our evil habits in particular, and the extent and greatness of that change of nature which is necessary to salvation, it remains to point out, more distinctly than has yet been done, the important practical lessons which the subject suggests. In this view, I would conclude the present discourse with a solemn address to those who are yet living in sinful or worldly habits,—who are yet in an unconverted state, and, to all practical purposes, *without God in the world*. I am the more anxious to address such persons, because, from the lamentable depravity of our nature, the consideration of the force of habit, pregnant as it is with motives to an immediate and earnest repentance, is often employed by the impenitent as an excuse for their continuance in sin, and is thus made to justify that very course of transgression which it produces.

Allow me then, my brethren, affectionately to press on your attention the dangerous and seductive influence of your present habits. Wherever you may have arrived in the slippery road, O stop and *consider your ways*. God now in mercy bids you turn and live. His

blessed Spirit with almighty grace is proposed to you in the Gospel. Weigh then your imminent though unsuspected state of danger. Be not deceived. It is of the nature of sinful habits to blind the mind. The very excuses you make to yourselves for not leading a religious life are proofs of your extreme peril.

You tell us, for example, that you are not conscious of any cause of alarm.—We reply, that this is amongst the most decided proofs and aggravations of your disease.

You assure us that you do not mean to offend the Almighty, and have no intention of provoking his wrath.—We answer, that this is the very effect of an inveterate habit of neglecting him.

You confidently assert that you think there is no necessity for this surprising rigour, as you term it, in religion.—We take you at your word, and bring forward the very admission as a proof that corrupt custom has darkened your judgment as to spiritual things.

You inform us how profoundly you still reverence Christianity, and how sincerely you approve of its laws.—We tell you that this barren speculation only sets you further off from actual piety and holiness.

You profess to rely on your external privileges, your baptism, your attendance on church and the sacrament.—We plainly declare

to you that these are opiates, and not medicines, so long as you persist in a worldly course.

But, when these pleas are silenced, you finally say, ‘I cannot repent and turn to God. I would be saved, but how can I?’—How can you? Pray for God’s Holy Spirit; think seriously of religion; avoid known sins; withdraw from such and such occasions of temptation; keep holy the Sabbath, consider your accountability.—‘I am unable to do this,’ is your reply.

In vain we endeavour to discover to you the illusion of these pretexts. In spite of the most pressing invitations, the most convincing reasons, the most fervent entreaties, in spite even of your occasional designs to repent, and of your very regret at being carried on so far in sin, you return always to the same answer—‘I cannot; would to God I had better guarded my heart; but it is taken, I despair of detaching it from its habits. Without divine grace I can do nothing. I am involved in a thousand bonds. Once more, I cannot.’ We admit in part your statement, but use it as the most startling proof of your danger.

You can indeed do nothing effectual in your present mind. *The way of the slothful is as an hedge of thorns, but the way of the righteous shall be made plain.* Every word you utter

proves your guilt. This very indolence of mind is your greatest enemy. It must be wholly changed, or you perish. Long habit has rivetted your chains. But reflect that the very strength and inveteracy of your habits is the most cogent argument for an immediate and a desperate effort to shake off their thralldom. For, strong as their influence is, it grows yet more powerful every day, every hour; and, if a continuance in evil or worldly practices up to this time has so tied and bound you in the chain of your sins, how deep, how deplorable, will that bondage become by a yet longer perseverance in the same course! What madness, then, what wretched self-deception, to postpone the task of repentance because it is difficult, when you know that adjournment will only increase its difficulty! What frightful, what inconceivable absurdity, even on the ground of your own reasoning, to defer that exertion for which you know that every additional moment will only more and more unfit you, to delay your attack on an enemy when you know that your delays will only arm him with tenfold energy!

Let me ask, however, why is it that you can do nothing? Not because the grace of God is wanting to you, but because you will make no effort. Why? because you are flattered by the false sweets of custom in sin, and imagine it to be necessary to your happiness.

Why? because feeling your weakness and the force of inveterate usage, you fear engaging in a war, where you would have such difficult attacks to support, and which would demand a courage superior to every assault. Why? because you falsely conceive a religious life to be bitter, secluded, austere, without object, without variety, without consolation. Why? because you under-estimate the secret but mighty efficacy of the Holy Spirit of God, or entangle yourselves with some puzzling questions about the human will and the divine agency on it.

But away with such delusions, and all is practicable. You have in truth never yet done what you could. You have never yet used the means of grace. For remember that, if we have told you of the extent and magnitude of the work of conversion, we have also told you that this great and extensive work is the operation of an omnipotent agent. If we have told you that a change so mighty cannot possibly be produced by human power, we have also told you that divine power is ever able, ever ready, to produce it in him who desires it in earnest.—Here then is the true improvement of the present subject. If your enemy be so powerful, use the right, the only available means, of obtaining victory. We do not ask you to under-rate the power of habit. We rather call on you to see it in all its terrible extent. We call on you to

feel, in the strongest manner, the utter imbecility of your own efforts to oppose it. We do so, in order that you may fly at once to the only remedy. *With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.* The greatest sinner may obtain in this way all needful help. No man ever perished for want of the offer of divine grace. *All things are ready.* If you delay, you will infallibly become more hardened. God may give you up to a reprobate mind. Age and death are approaching. Your chains may be rivetted for ever. Now is the time of mercy. Now a beam of light breaks across your path. Now you see for the instant something of your guilt and danger. Act immediately and thoroughly on the conviction; burst asunder the bands of sin; despair of nothing in the strength of God; confess the crimes of your nature and heart and conduct and habits; begin those acts which may go to form habits of obedience and holiness. Your neglect of this renders nugatory all your excuses on the ground of your inability; you *frame not your doings to turn unto the Lord.* It is not possible that all can be done at once. It is not possible that you can have perfect ease and readiness in religious duties in a moment. Only begin. Stop in the career of sin, and worldliness, and selfishness, and sensuality. Implore converting grace; avoid temptation; pray; read the Bible; hear

the preaching of God's word ; beg the advice of pious friends. Conscience will guide you on your way. Light will increase, if you follow what you have. The Holy Spirit will work effectually in your heart. New thoughts, new desires, new principles will arise. Things that seemed impossible, when you were excusing yourself and only talking about religion, will become comparatively easy when you are actually engaged in it. You will acquire an aptness as you proceed. It is the first step, the turning from our evil ways, the breaking up of confirmed habits, the commencement of the service of God, which is the great difficulty. Only overcome this by the aid of divine grace ; and you will quickly find that your way is becoming plain before your face, and that the yoke of Christ is truly easy and his burden light.

Henceforth the influence of habit, instead of impeding, will begin to assist you in your course. The inclinations which rendered you averse to religion will grow weaker. The difficulties in the ways of piety will diminish. The practical inward principles of religion will become stronger, both in themselves, and in reference to the habits which oppose them. Thus a new character will be formed ; a character utterly unattainable by the unassisted efforts of fallen nature. The mind will be turned to a

constant pursuit of all *holy conversation and godliness*. This will become at length a fixed habit, and will be accompanied by a sacred ambition of improvement, which, enlarging its prospects in proportion to its progress, will correspond with the unlimited increase of the capacities of the soul through every period of an endless existence.

SERMON XVIII.

THE FORCE OF HABIT.

PSALM CXXXIX. 23, 24.

Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

SELF-SUSPICION is necessary to our growth in grace. The influence of habit, acting on the corruption of our nature, and aided by the temptations around us, is perpetually tending, either to seduce us back into sinful or doubtful practices once abandoned, or to form us by imperceptible degrees, to some new course of spirit or conduct unfavourable to our progress in Christian knowledge and virtue. Even in the best persons, the force of this tendency is so great, and its operation so insidious, as to expose them, without a continual watchfulness on their part, to the greatest dangers. It was evidently under a deep sense of this truth, that the Psalmist uttered the prayer in the text. Filled with apprehension lest some improper habit should insensibly have been formed in his

life and character, and feeling the utter inability of his own unassisted efforts either to detect or to expel the latent evil, he fervently implored the aid of that divine grace which alone could sufficiently enlighten his understanding and fortify his holy resolutions: *Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.* The subject is of the greatest practical importance, and calls for the most serious attention. In contemplating it, let us consider,

I. The operation of unfavourable habits on true Christians.

II. The means of preventing the formation of such habits, or of discovering and overcoming them when formed.

We begin by noticing,

I. THE OPERATION OF UNFAVOURABLE HABITS ON TRUE CHRISTIANS.

If we examine our hearts and lives with a due diligence, even the best of us will be satisfied that, in too many instances, the force of habit proves prejudicial to our most valuable interests. In some cases, former habits imperfectly subdued, regain a partial ascendancy over us. In others, one or two casual deviations from the strictness of Christian practice, are imperceptibly matured into a system. In order to form

just conceptions on this subject, it may be necessary to consider in detail a few of the points in which the excellence of the Christian character ought peculiarly to display itself, and to inquire how far that obligation is actually fulfilled in the practice of the generality of those who profess a supreme attention to the concerns of religion.

If, in the first place, we select the most extensive topic which the subject comprises, I mean the Christian's ADVANCE IN GRACE AND IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST, it will be easily admitted that nothing can less befit the character of a true Christian than a readiness to acquiesce in his present measure of attainments, and to be satisfied with mediocrity. And yet perhaps there are few of us who are not secretly injured in this way. At the commencement of our religious course, we are anxious to *attain, if by any means, to the resurrection of the dead*. We proceed a given length in repentance and faith, in love and obedience. But after a period we gradually become less solicitous, and are more easily satisfied with the evidences of our safety. Indolent habits are in some degree formed as to our religious duties and progress. Instead of striving after perfection, we are content to model ourselves by the opinions or practice of such persons about us as have the repute

of piety. It is remarkable that, in the apostolic churches, the Gentile and Jewish Christians, though on the whole sincere and earnest in their Christian profession, yet retained a considerable tincture of the habits of thinking and of acting familiar to them in their unconverted state. Thus in the present day too many of us are Christians, but not saints. We are sincere, but not exemplary. We love our Saviour, but we do not love him enough. We cultivate prayer, but we do not sufficiently delight in it. We are separated from the world in the ordinary sense of the term, but we are not crucified to it. We resist the deeds of the body, but we do not thoroughly mortify them. We are alive, but have not our *senses, by reason of use, exercised to discern both good and evil*. Our religion is tame, languid, sickly. We flatter ourselves that we are in a safe state. We imagine that we repent truly of sin, are justified by faith in the righteousness of God in Christ, and are living a holy life ; but we are not lively and devout and flourishing Christians ; we could not say like St. Paul, *This one thing I do, forgetting the things that are behind and reaching forth unto those things that are before, I press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*. On the contrary, we sink at times into a mere *form of knowledge and of godliness*. Too much of self-will, self-in-

dulgence, ostentation, fear of man, love of praise, ambition, discontent, covetousness, mingles in our temper and conduct, and mars both our comfort and our usefulness. And whence is all this?—habit, perhaps without our own consciousness, governs us. We have gradually accustomed ourselves to a low standard of piety. We are habituated to the routine in which we move, and are not anxious for a sphere more elevated. To alter the whole course of our religious habits, and rise to a higher and purer order of attainments, would be an effort too arduous, too painful. I put this general case strongly, because I believe there are thousands of estimable persons who might be stimulated to vastly greater improvements in religion, if they could but be led to suspect themselves, and to examine the defects of the entire system on which they proceed.

To impress this consideration the more, let us notice the influence of habit on our DEVOTIONAL DUTIES. How is it that private prayer is often so cursorily performed, so briefly, so coldly? How is it that we have so faint an impression of the presence of God, so little solemnity, earnestness, humility? How is it that we suffer so many interruptions to impede our due discharge of the duty? How is it that we can be satisfied with having performed it, though there has been little fervour, little con-

trition of heart, little exercise of faith, of love, of hope, of joy? How is it that we can yield at times to the temptation of omitting it altogether? In family and public prayer, again, what can account for the indifference which frequently steals over us, for the wandering of our thoughts and affections, for the absence of true and deep feeling? In confession, in supplication, in thanksgiving, we follow the devotional formularies of our church; but with how little meaning or fixedness of heart! I am not now supposing a total want of spirituality in the worship of God; this would place us out of the class of persons whom I am now addressing: nor do I mean to assume that occasional elevations of piety are not to be found in our religious duties. But I would ask you, and ask myself, whether, in this vital point, some unfavourable habit has not crept upon us? I would ask whether our devotions exhibit that ardour and delight and humiliation which are characteristic of the real and eminent saint? I would ask whether we do not sometimes start on discovering the extent of our declension from our "first love" and early fervour? I would ask whether any thing short of the powerful influence of habit, co-operating with the remains of our corrupt nature, could have produced a decay so deplorable, or have blinded our minds to its guilt and danger?

But I go on to another topic, THE MANAGEMENT OF OUR GENERAL CONCERNS IN LIFE. Has no wrong usage established itself in the performance of some of the numerous duties to which we are called? I speak not of particular errors to which the best are liable, nor of those infirmities which attend the execution of our purest purposes. But I speak of courses, wrong and improper in their very principle. I speak of those practices which we cannot defend, if we come out from the trammels of usage, and appeal simply to the rule of God's law; and which, though they may relate to small things as we think, are yet decidedly unfriendly to moral discipline of mind and conduct. Is there no *way of wickedness* in us, to use the language of the text, which we do not forsake, only because negligence and inattention have made it habitual? *Whatever we do in word or deed, do we do all in the name of the Lord Jesus?* Do we aim, with the Apostle, at *whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, and whatsoever things are of good report?* Do we exercise ourselves to have a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man? Can we say, *Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not by fleshly wisdom, but by the grace*

of God, we have had our conversation in the world? Do we follow the obvious, plain, extensive, beneficial rule of our Saviour, *Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them?* Do we apply this maxim to all our dealings? Do we place ourselves in the situation of those with whom we are concerned, and then simply act, as we should reasonably wish them to have acted? Is there no art, no selfishness, no want of perfect candour, openness, honour, and integrity in our transactions? Do we maintain the same strictness of conduct, in secret as in public, in matters comparatively trifling as in affairs of moment? It is perfectly surprising how frequently persons, who may on the whole be considered as sincerely religious, are yet betrayed into considerable faults in these or similar respects. The first failure happens unguardedly. A repetition of it in one or two instances blunts their moral perception, and prepares the way for further lapses: till what was at first a scarcely perceptible deviation from the right path, becomes at length a labyrinth of error, equally perplexed and dangerous.

If, again, we inquire what is the cause of so many inconsistencies in the order of CHRISTIAN FAMILIES, the reply must be the same, Habit, working on a corrupt nature. The whole mould and complexion, the manners, and general

management of many households, betray the silent influence of practices begun without intention, and continued by the effect of use and custom. I speak not of the omission of family prayer, or other obvious duties, because I am addressing sincere Christians, and therefore cannot suppose the existence of such irregularities; but I speak of faults in the conduct of the domestic circle, which, though less palpable, are scarcely less reprehensible; of the bad tempers,—the discontent,—the disorder,—the insubordination, — the indolence, — the extravagance,—the love of company, dress, or amusements,—the unseasonable hours,—the waste of time,—the deficient observation of the Sabbath,—the unforgiving spirit,—the haughtiness towards inferiors,—the use of vain books,—of which too many pious families afford instances. Even in these particulars, I am not to be understood as charging on Christian heads of families any such particular or gross defects as would be inconsistent with a supposition of the general sincerity of their religious profession. But I simply beg leave to ask, if it is not possible that many very unhappy habits may, in a great degree, have sapped the life and spirituality and simplicity of religion in our families. I ask if we are *walking in our house in a perfect way?* if, like Joshua, unseduced by the example of

others, we are determined, that, *as for us and our house, we will serve the Lord?*

Let us pass to a kindred subject, THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN, and inquire if we can trace out no vestiges of habitual defects here? No part of our duty is more important, and none more difficult. And yet how many religious parents appear to be contented with committing their children to faithful instructors, and to believe that, having discharged this first duty, they are acquitted from all further personal labour? How few *train up*—habituate, form—a child in the way that he should go, in order that, *when he is old, he may not depart from it?* How few seem to remember that it is not so much the professed and formal lesson which educates the child, as the living influence of the examples that surround it, the spirit and conversation, the tempers and pursuits of its parents or companions? This, this is the nurture and admonition, which it receives. This, if it be truly Christian, will, under the divine blessing, produce the happiest effects. It is of little moment that we distinguish ourselves in the eyes of our children by a profession of evangelical truth or a stated observance of religious duties, if they perceive in our general deportment the marks of peevishness, severity, worldly-mindedness, fretfulness, or inconstancy. On the contrary, the exhibition of such in-

congruities of character will serve little other purpose than to lodge in the minds of youth a prejudice against vital religion which perhaps nothing can afterwards remove. And, though it would be absurd to suppose that a truly Christian parent will habitually allow himself in such inconsistencies, yet is there not, even in persons of this description, an occasional approximation to the evil? Were not Eli and David, though men of undoubted piety, greatly culpable in their domestic relations? Did not Jacob, with all his attainments in religion, show an undue partiality to some of his children above others? And are not too many Christians betrayed into an imitation of these examples?

Again, if we consider THE USE WE MAKE OF OUR PROPERTY, WHATEVER IT MAY BE, we shall see still farther reason to lament the influence of habit upon us in our imperfect state on earth. *Let your conversation, saith the Apostle, be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have.* Are, then, our manner of life, our turn of mind, our walk in the world, decidedly free from the inordinate desire of gain? How do we act in the acquisition of wealth? How in the employment of it? How upon the loss of it? Do we spend liberally on our fancy and humour, whilst we are reluctant and backward in consecrating our worldly means to the promotion of the interests

of religion or humanity? Are we fond of display and exhibition, and can we incur considerable expenses for objects which will incidentally subserve these ends, whilst our private and ordinary dealings are disfigured by much narrowness and selfishness? What proportion do our charities bear, not to those of our neighbours, nor to our own under other circumstances, but to the property which God has at present intrusted to our stewardship? Do we give according as God has given to us, or according to what others do; that is, do we give upon principle, or in compliance with custom? O, let us remember, that the *love of money is the root of all evil, which while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.* Unsuspected habits of covetousness are amongst the most common and most dishonourable of the defects into which even sincere Christians are occasionally betrayed. The very first beginnings of this dreadful and insidious vice should be watched, and no labour, or effort, spared for eradicating, by the aid of divine grace, the growing mischief.

Once more, what are our TEMPERs? — I mean, not merely with reference to our domestic relations, in which view I have already touched on this topic, but with reference to the members in general of the society in which we

live? Do we cultivate the meek and lowly, the charitable and forgiving, the patient and forbearing dispositions which adorned our blessed Lord and Saviour? What lamentable effects does one unchristian temper, long indulged and habitually strengthened, produce! Much of the happiness of a whole family, much of the honour of our Christian profession, much of the consistency and comfort of our lives, may be injured by a single evil disposition not early and vigorously subdued. Let us learn therefore to search into ourselves, with a view of ascertaining our state in this respect: with a view of discovering whether an impetuous and irascible disposition on the one hand, or a blameable facility and pliancy of temper on the other, are acquiring force; whether harshness and severity, envy and moroseness, pride and sullenness, fretfulness and discontent, levity and indifference, sloth and carelessness, are insinuating themselves into the frame and habit of our minds. It is easy to be religious, at least it is easy to persuade ourselves that we are so, when nothing occurs to cross our temper, or oppose our natural bias. It is easy to be always yielding, or always resolute. But to exhibit habitually any tolerable (and at the best it will be but a tolerable) consistency of truly Christian self-government, is a triumph of grace indeed.

But the time would fail me, if I were to attempt to trace out adequately the operation of unfavourable habits on true Christians. They may affect every branch of our religious and moral conduct. They may show themselves in all the bodily and mental acts of which we are capable. They may appear in all the parts of our duty towards God, towards our neighbour, and towards ourselves. The evil may vary in degree, as well as in extent. It may scarcely be visible, or it may amount to an obvious inconsistency. It may be soon detected and remedied, or it may continue till it appears rooted in our very nature. It may be checked by good instruction and example, or it may be nourished by bad. It may amount to scarcely more than the infirmity of the best Christian, or it may lead on to great iniquities—to grievous defection, and even apostacy from God. In every case however, habits, whether more or less evil, are, by the very constitution of our nature, in constant progress; and, in proportion as they are suffered to remain undisturbed, they become more and more difficult to be eradicated.

Let us then consider,

II. THE MEANS OF PREVENTING THE FORMATION OF UNFAVOURABLE HABITS, OR OF DISCOVERING AND OVERCOMING THEM WHEN FORMED.

The only means, properly speaking, by the agency of which these important ends can be accomplished, are the ILLUMINATION AND GRACE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. It is the instruction of that blessed Spirit which shows us our real character, and enables us to understand and correct our errors. The bright splendour of his light reveals to us the true state of our habits, our motives, our declines, our dangers. And only the communication of inward strength from him can make us resolute and successful in detecting and opposing our habitual sins and infirmities. For, as is intimated in the text, He alone supplies both that quickened perception by which we discover whether *there be any wicked way in us*, and that heavenly guidance by which we may *be led in the way everlasting*.

But the expectation of this light and assistance must not preclude the use of subordinate means directed to the end in view; and, indeed, it is only in the diligent use of such means, that the aid of the Holy Ghost can be expected. Of such subordinate means, the first and the last,—that which must accompany and render effectual every other,—is FERVENT PRAYER. It is to this method that the Psalmist has recourse in our text. He addresses himself to God by earnest supplication. He entreats him to *search and know him, and see if there was any wicked way in him*. Prayer, more than most

other religious duties, brings us into the immediate presence of God, humbles the whole soul, silences the excuses of pride, and quickens the testimony of conscience. Prayer therefore most directly opposes every evil habit, and best exercises every holy one; independently of the divine grace and mercy which it is the means of obtaining. If we would at all prosper, therefore, as Christians, we must *pray without ceasing*: we must pray in the solitude of our own chambers, and in the assemblies of the faithful: and we must attempt ever to keep our minds in that humble, lowly, and teachable frame, which is the proper attitude of supplication.

To prayer should be joined a DILIGENT STUDY OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES, with a view of examining our own habits of thought, feeling, and action, by the standard of that unerring rule. Instead of comparing ourselves with our neighbours, or (what is a still less efficacious method of detecting our evil habits) comparing ourselves with ourselves, we shall here have the opportunity of comparing ourselves with the requisitions of the perfect law of God. Nor ought this comparison only to be general, or confined to first principles. It ought to be accurate; extending to our thoughts, words, and deeds; to our motives and to our conduct; to our behaviour in public and in private, in our families and in society. By

persevering in such a course of reading, we shall indeed find that the word of the Lord is *a light unto our feet and a lamp unto our path*; that his *commandment is pure, enlightening the eyes, that his testimony is sure, making wise the simple.*

Closely allied to the study of the Scriptures, thus explained,—or rather, indeed, a part of it,—is the duty of WATCHFULNESS AND SELF-EXAMINATION. By these terms, I would be understood to imply an actual and minute study of our character and a series of efforts in forming it; a strict attention to our prevailing tendencies of mind; a careful investigation of the probable causes of our past failures; a serious consideration of the dangers to which, from our peculiar tempers, dispositions, or circumstances, we are most exposed; and a diligent endeavour, under the divine blessing, to fortify ourselves with additional motives and principles, on what appears to be our weak side. In carrying this rule into effect, we should be particularly attentive to what were our characteristic sins or failings in the former part of our lives, when we paid little or no serious attention to the concerns of religion. For it is probable that, in this quarter, our greatest danger still lies. Conversion by divine grace, is a gradual work. What we were, therefore, before that great change which awakened us to

a sense of our spiritual interests, we may be disposed in some measure to become again after it. Old sins, though broken off in the main, may attempt to revive; and they will attempt this, and will succeed in the attempt, unless by a jealous guard of our vulnerable part, and a humble reliance on the help of the Holy Spirit, we prevent them.

Let it not be supposed that, by thus recommending to the Christian, active efforts in the formation of his own character, we disparage that divine grace from which all our strength and all our improvement must undoubtedly proceed. To make such efforts, indeed, in a reliance on our own power or good intentions, would be highly presumptuous and unwarrantable; and this is the common fault of irreligious persons, who, desirous perhaps of quieting conscience by an aim at some moral amendment, but not duly apprehending the need of divine grace, set about the enterprise on mistaken principles, and therefore usually fail of attaining even that limited degree of amelioration which they pursue. But not to make the endeavour at all, is evidently to tempt God to his face. Strenuous exertion and humble dependence on the Holy Spirit is the scriptural rule, and can alone lead to a knowledge of ourselves, and an actual growth in holy principles and habits.

In connexion with the means I have already mentioned, and as auxiliary to them, I would particularly advise you to cultivate the habit of a perpetual IMPRESSION OF THE DIVINE PRESENCE. The idea is suggested by the Psalm of which the text is the conclusion; and surely no stronger prevention or remedy can be conceived for any of the evil habits to which we may be liable, than this holy practice of acting, as if under the constant inspection of an all-seeing and all-perfect Being. Nothing can be better calculated to rouse us from unpropitious courses of conduct, than the reflection that God *knows our down-sitting and our up-rising, and understands our thoughts afar off: that he compasses our path and our lying down, and is acquainted with all our ways; that there is not a word in our tongue, but he knows it altogether.* This reflection will tend to disturb us when in an indolent or indifferent frame of mind, will quicken our attention to our smallest acts, and will excite us to watch against even the beginnings of improper habits. The impression of the sensible objects around us will become weaker, the effect of human example less seductive, and even the strongest of our evil habits will relax their hold on us, while we recollect that we are ever under the scrutiny of Him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and that

this omniscient Observer is one day to be our Judge.

In addition to the great and leading rules which we have laid down for the prevention or suppression of evil habits, there are some practical directions on the subject, which may be attended to with advantage; and of which, though we cannot now fully enter into them, it may be desirable to mention two or three. It is, for example, an useful practical maxim, to AC-CUSTOM OURSELVES TO SELF-CONTROL IN MATTERS OF SMALL MOMENT, AS A TRAINING FOR THOSE OF GREATER IMPORTANCE. There are many practices not absolutely sinful, which yet may be inexpedient. There are numerous acts from which we shall do well to abstain, were it merely for the sake of a lesson of forbearance. If we permit ourselves to go to the very verge of what is right, the mere movement thus far,—the indulgence up to this point,—may have the effect of betraying us beyond the limit. Perpetual self-government even in little things is necessary in such a scene of temptation as we live in, not only because little things lead on to great, but because the habit acquired by such acts of mortification is a salutary and safe one. The passions are thus curbed and kept under due management; the judgment is preserved clear and watchful; and the heart,

prepared by discipline, is more easily subjugated to the law of Christ.

In like manner, when we have discovered any particular wrong habit, we should INSTANTLY BEGIN A COURSE OF ACTS CALCULATED TO COUNTERACT IT AND TO INDUCE THE OPPOSITE RIGHT HABIT. There is no neutral ground in morals. The tendency of our nature to make that easy which we do repeatedly, is constantly operating. The moment, therefore, that conscience reproaches us with a habit of sin, and we discover that we are really faulty, no time is to be lost. We must not stand delaying. We must at once rend ourselves from the transgression, however long accustomed to it, and begin those particular acts which are of a directly opposite tendency. We cannot expect to find the same delight in this new course, which we had in the old one. Nor is it in the first instance necessary. Pleasure is not to create the habit, but habit the pleasure. Enter, therefore, with whatever disinclination, on the duty to be performed. If the sinful inclination has been towards covetousness, task yourself with deeds of beneficence; if towards the vanities of the world, abridge yourself of even lawful indulgences; if towards harshness and severity, impel yourself to acts of kindness and love. The attempt, if united with prayer, will prove successful. The right line of conduct,

firmly and resolutely pursued, will re-act upon, and gradually rectify, the mental disposition. It is not by speculation and reasoning that habits are acquired, but by acts. No man overcomes evil tendencies, and frames himself to the contrary good ones, in solitude merely; it is in the scenes of active duty that principles are exercised and invigorated, and habits formed and natured.

As the rule we have just considered relates to the correction of evil habits when once formed, so the next I shall mention is directed to prevent their formation. ALWAYS AVOID, then, THE FIRST ACTS OF A DOUBTFUL NATURE. Every single instance of compliance with our evil inclinations, impairs our powers of resistance, and leaves us more accessible to the next assault. The Christian habit of the mind is broken in upon; the sensibility of conscience is weakened; and a foundation of evil habit is laid which it may not be easy hereafter to dig up, so to speak, and destroy. All questions, then, of conformity to the world, to its corrupt or questionable practices, to its sinful or frivolous amusements, are at once to be resolved on the safe and the only safe side. Whatever you doubt of, avoid.—Such hearts as ours, in such a position as we occupy, are not to be trifled with. We must remember that we have enemies who can enter in at the

smallest breach ; enemies, whom we are safe only in completely excluding, and with whom even to parley is to surrender.

In this connexion, I would particularly inculcate the importance of FORMING RIGHT HABITS IN THE EARLY PART OF OUR RELIGIOUS PROFESSION. Were there no other motive to deter us from sinful or inexpedient indulgences in youth, the consideration of the influence which they will too probably produce in our future lives, might operate as a sufficient dissuasive. The few first years of our religious course, very commonly give a colour to all the rest. The rashness, self-will, and obstinacy, which are sometimes observable in young persons professing a regard to religion, may usually be regarded as no doubtful preludes to worse evils at a future period of their career,—to gross inconsistencies of conduct, to dangerous mistakes of opinion, perhaps to heretical errors, or even to final apostacy. To be cautious, then, and humble, and docile, in the beginning of our Christian life, is of the greatest importance. This is the only temper appropriate to that season of inexperience ; the only proper or efficient preparation for a course of scriptural piety,—of piety, ripe, well-ordered, consistent, uniform, permanent, heavenly.

We may close our consideration of the means by which unfavourable habits are to be

avoided, or to be discovered and overcome, by proposing one rule of great comprehensiveness. Let us be BETTER GROUNDED AND EXERCISED IN THE FIRST ELEMENTS OF TRUE RELIGION. Let a sense of our accountableness, of the holiness of God's law, of the evil and malignity of sin, of the person and work of Christ, of his atonement and intercession, of salvation by grace, of justification by faith only, of union with Christ and love to him, of the person and work of the Holy Spirit, of his grace and influences on the heart, and of the insufficiency of all human endeavours without his mighty operations, be more fixed and wrought into our souls. Many unfavourable moral habits, like many bodily diseases, arise from the circumstance of the whole constitution being infirm or distempered. Let the general tone and vigour of health be restored, and the particular symptoms will disappear. Let the root of the tree be duly nourished, and the fruit will abound. In vain shall we labour at setting right this or that disordered temper or affection, unless we at the same time live near to Christ, imbibe his grace, and are sanctified by his Spirit. In vain shall we endeavour to rectify our particular habits, unless our governing principles be sound and vigorous; and never can these be sound or vigorous, unless we abound in faith and in love to a crucified Re-

deemer. No inferior, no less elevated motives, will actuate the whole man, and impel him to a steady and consistent course of exertion. Here, and here only, lies, if I may so express myself, the whole art and mystery of practical holiness.

I have now considered the subject before us under the two divisions I proposed ; but, before I conclude this discourse, I think it proper,

I. TO INTERPOSE A CAUTION, for which some of the preceding remarks may possibly give occasion.

For there may be a danger lest those remarks should be so misinterpreted as to excite needless scruples or despondency in some tender and conscientious minds. Despair is the enemy of all exertion ; and, when scruples on matters really indifferent harass and perplex the conscience, the effect is often rather unfavourable to a progress in practical religion than otherwise. I would therefore observe that we are not to suppose that every occasional error or infirmity amounts to what we have been considering as an evil habit ; for imperfection cleaves to every Christian in this world. Nor are we to conclude that we are declining in religion because the first warmth and vividness of our religious impressions have in some measure worn off. “ Passive impressions,” says Bishop

Butler, “ by being repeated grow weaker, whilst practical habits are formed and strengthened by repetition. Active habits may be gradually forming and strengthening by a course of acting upon such and such motives and excitements, whilst these motives and excitements themselves are less sensibly felt. Active principles therefore, at the very time that they are less lively as to our perception of them than they were at first, are found to be somehow wrought more thoroughly into the temper and character, and become more effectual in influencing our practice. Perception of danger, for instance, naturally excites fear which is a passive habit, and caution which is an active one: by being inured to danger habits of caution are gradually increased, at the same time that those of fear are proportionably lessened. Perception of distress in others is again a natural excitement to pity which is passive, and to beneficence which is active; but let a man set himself to attend to, inquire out and relieve distressed persons, and he cannot but grow less and less sensibly affected with the various miseries of life with which he must become acquainted, when yet at the same time, benevolence as a practical principle of action will strengthen. So also, at the same time that the daily instances of men’s dying around us give us daily a less sensible passive feeling or

apprehension of our own mortality, such instances greatly contribute to the strengthening a practical regard to it in serious men; that is, to forming a habit of acting with a constant view to it."

It should appear therefore that our religious impressions may be expected to become somewhat less intense and lively, in proportion as we become more familiar with them, whilst at the same time, if we are carrying these impressions into act, our Christian virtues will be still growing more confirmed and vigorous. This suggestion may afford considerable relief to a timid and conscientious Christian.

Such a Christian, however, will endeavour to remedy this particular effect of use on our passive habits, and to assist his sensitive by his rational and spiritual nature. He will aim at correcting this unfavourable action of a general and most beneficial law of our being. He will no more surrender himself to the mechanism of his frame, than to the impulse of his passions *. He will endeavour to revive his original impressions of religious truth by a deeper sense of his obligations to his Saviour, by a more frequent recollection of the grounds on which those obligations rest, by prayer for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and by a diligent use of all the

* See Dr. Paley on 1 Cor. ix. 27.

other means of grace; thus in every way striving that, by the blessing of God on his exertions, his faded affections may be revived, his piety re-animated to its former warmth; and that the stupendous truths of revelation and redemption may again stand exhibited to his mind in all the freshness of a first discovery.

II. In the next place I would deduce from the subject which we have been considering, AN IMPORTANT LESSON;—that of CHARITY as to others and of HUMILIATION as to ourselves.

In judging of our Christian brethren we can scarcely exercise a CHARITY too exuberant. The consciousness of our own defects and the remembrance of the astonishing force of habit even in good men, should check all hasty opinions of others, and should lead us to put the most favourable construction upon their actions. We know little of ourselves, and much less of our neighbours. We are no fair judges of their duties, their temptations, their early prepossessions, their designs, their circumstances. Perhaps, in their situation, we should have fallen into habits still more questionable than those which we censure in them. There still may be in them a divine life, little as we think of it—*Lateat scintillula forsan*. If God bears with them, surely we may. A tender and charitable spirit is, at any rate, far more likely to amend

them, if they are indeed wrong, than the language of austere, peevish, or imperious censure.

Instead, then, of harshness towards our fellow Christians, let us each learn HUMILIATION as to ourselves. O, what cause have we for shame and self-reproach! How defective are we as to the improvement of our moral and religious faculties! The best of us are still, as it were, unformed, unfinished creatures; deficient and unqualified, from a want of knowledge and experience, for that mature state of life, which was the end of our new creation. Let us then prostrate ourselves before the throne of our Saviour. Let us not only talk of humility, but really feel that we are mere children and infants in understanding and holy habits. Let us unreservedly repose our hope only on the sacrifice and merits of our divine Lord. Let us contrast his infinite grace with our utter unworthiness. Let us cultivate an unaffected lowliness and teachableness of heart; and thus aim at discovering and confessing our various unfavourable habits of mind or conduct.

But we must not stop here; a lesson of charity and humility is not enough; I must be allowed, in the last place,

III. TO ANIMATE THE CHRISTIAN TO NEW EFFORTS IN OPPOSING AND CONQUERING HIS REMAINING EVIL HABITS.

For no real benefit can arise from all we have

considered, unless we apply to ourselves individually the several topics to which we have adverted. We must bring home to our own bosoms still more closely than we have yet done, the description of our various evil habits; and must actually employ without delay the means for preventing or opposing them. For, what is the plainest obligation of our Christian calling, what is the proper effect of all our great principles, what the design and scope of every separate grace and duty, but the achieving the conquest over those very unfavourable habits which have been the subject of this discourse? Undoubtedly there is no character so noble or so rare, as the elevated, laborious, consistent, and amiable Christian, who, engaged strenuously in the conflict with remaining evil, gradually advances in the actual victory over these his most insidious spiritual foes.

And what should the unutterable blessings of salvation teach us, but the denial, in every possible way, of *ungodliness and worldly lusts*? To what are we *redeemed*, but to be thus a *peculiar people zealous of good works*? What is the proper effect of the love of Christ, but to *constrain* us, in this manner, to *live, not unto ourselves, but unto Him that died for us and rose again*? What is the design of that sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit by which we should be governed, but to form us to a

divine nature? And who can be ignorant that every one of these practical results resolves itself very much into this conquest over our corrupt habits of temper and conduct? Surely, then, if we entertain any hope that we have been called to the knowledge of Christ,—that we have been *chosen in him before the foundation of the world*,—that we have been blessed with *the gift of righteousness*, and raised to the privileges of adoption; if we profess a love to our adorable Lord; if we desire to yield a cheerful obedience to his commands, and cherish any expectations of eternal glory, we shall prove the sincerity of our faith by shaking off the slumbers which steal upon us; we shall begin more resolutely to correct our unfavourable customs and habits; we shall *awake* more and more *to righteousness*, shall *mortify our members which are upon the earth*, shall *exercise ourselves unto godliness*, *lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us*, and, in one comprehensive word, we shall PUT ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, and not make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof.

SERMON XIX.

TEMPTATION.

MATTHEW, VI. 13.

Lead us not into temptation.

WHEN our blessed Lord had directed his disciples to implore the forgiveness of their trespasses, he taught them in the next place to pray for deliverance from temptation. Having sought pardon for our past sins, we must earnestly entreat to be preserved from the repetition of them. The mercy of God should increase our fear of offending him ; and gratitude for the remission of guilt, should inflame the soul with a hatred of every transgression. None indeed can have a scriptural sense of justification, unless they diligently seek after sanctifying grace ; of which one chief work is to lead us to shun the occasions and temptations to evil. Nor, indeed, can a more important subject than that of temptation be proposed to our attention generally. Our state on earth is probationary. Every thing around us and within us may be the means of ensnaring our minds.

Let us then consider,

I. What is the nature of temptation.

II. What is the force of the petition of our text with regard to it.

I. WHAT IS THE NATURE OF TEMPTATION.

TEMPTATION is any thing by which we may be drawn or incited to evil. It differs from a mere trial, as it includes in it, not only some thing which *proves us whether we will keep God's commandments or not*, but also something which moves or induces to moral evil. The word Temptation, is, indeed, frequently employed in the former sense, as when God is said to have tempted, that is, to have tried, Abraham; but in our text, as well as in the more ordinary acceptation of the word, it means some direct persuasion or enticement to transgression against God.

The sources of temptation are either inward or outward. THE INWARD SOURCE OF IT is the corruption of our fallen nature, that *sin which dwelleth in us*, that *fleshly mind*, that *law of sin in our members*, which wars against the law of grace, and which, unless it be resisted, will bring us into captivity. *Every man is tempted, when he is drawn aside of his own lust and enticed.* This inward spring of evil acts in the unregenerate with its full force. They *fulfil the desires of the flesh and of the mind.* They *make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts*

thereof. Even in the true Christian there remains a tendency to evil, which requires constant vigilance. His new and heavenly nature and dispositions are far from being complete. He is enabled indeed by the grace of the Holy Spirit habitually to serve God in sincerity, and to *mortify the deeds of the body*; yet temptation still has a powerful influence on him; it defiles his mind, and impedes his progress in the path of duty. *The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.*

THE OUTWARD SOURCES OF TEMPTATIONS ARE SATAN AND THE WORLD. Satan is called by way of distinction the tempter—*then cometh THE TEMPTER*, as if there were no other. It was he who kept not his first estate, but fell from his original glory. It was he who deceived our first parents, and brought sin and destruction into the perfect creation of God. It was he who appeared among the sons of God with Job. It was he who stirred up David to number Israel; who induced Judas to betray Christ; and who *desired to have Peter, that he might sift him as wheat.* He has his own peculiar devices, arts and methods of assailing the heart of man. Our Lord speaks of *the depths of Satan*—an expression conveying the idea of that subtlety with which his plans are conceived and executed.

This dexterous enemy seduces men, blinds their understandings, fills their minds with evil suggestions ; and disposes every thing within his reach to awaken their evil propensities, stupify their consciences, and inflame their passions.

His chief access is probably to the imagination, which he excites by presenting suitable objects to the senses. These allure the fancy, pervert the conscience, and obscure the judgment. The affections being enticed and taken captive, sinful acts follow. Thus Eve was first attracted by the appearance of the forbidden fruit, and Achan by the Babylonish garment. A vagrant curiosity, an unguarded and unsubdued imagination, *thoughts only evil continually*, wandering and fickle desires, aided by *a heart deceitful above all things and desperately wicked*—these are the strong holds of our spiritual adversary. His methods are adapted to the age, education, disposition, pursuits, knowledge, habits, duties and trials of men under every possible variety of circumstances. Sometimes he is represented as *the roaring lion*, at other times as *the old serpent*. In the first character he seeks to devour his prey ; in the second to allure it into his toils.

It is to be observed, however, that Satan has NO POWER TO FORCE US TO THE COMMISSION OF SIN. He may solicit and persuade ; he may propose objects calculated to deceive our vigi-

lance; he may by these ways seduce and inflame our passions : but he cannot compel us to yield. He has no dominion over the will. We are still rational and moral agents. He cannot eventually hurt us, except by our own fault. This is a most important consideration on the present subject.

To Satan must be added THE WORLD, as an outward occasion of temptation. The world is the main instrument by which he assails the soul. He is called, with an emphasis sufficient to alarm the slothful conscience, *the god of this world*. Wicked men are his instruments ; and assist in the temptation and ruin of others. Wicked customs, maxims, pleasures, pursuits, are the baits which he displays to us ; nor is there any creature of God, however good in itself, but he labours to enlist it in his service. And the world is well adapted to his purpose. It is exactly suited to the taste of the natural man. By the fall we have lost our knowledge, and love of spiritual pursuits; we have become absorbed in sensible and earthly objects; and give them the supreme place in our affections. Every thing therefore of worldly business, gain, power, praise, grandeur, pleasure, becomes the appropriate instrument of Satan's temptations. Even things lawful in themselves are still, in the excess, inducements to sin. *All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of*

the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

THE OBJECT aimed at in all temptations is to draw us into sin and destroy our souls. In the ungodly man Satan reigns. *As a strong man armed, he keeps his palace, and his goods are in peace.* His object is to secure and retain his subjects, to impede the progress of truth, to misrepresent and pervert the Gospel, to harden the conscience, and to carry men on in the *broad road which leadeth to destruction.* He adapts his temptations, accordingly, to this purpose. The open way of profaneness and the bye-path of hypocrisy are equally suited to his design. Whatever may check a true repentance, and a genuine submission to the Gospel, he takes care to present before the unwary sinner, and to present under the most imposing aspect.

In the case of true Christians, the object of temptation is to DRAW THEM BACK UNTO PERDITION. To this end, the devil labours so to dispose his snares, that they may be led to grieve the Holy Spirit, may be separated from Christ, may be thrown off their guard, may relax in secret devotion and watchfulness over their hearts, may disgrace the Gospel, may be disquieted in their minds, may murmur against the divine dealings, and be harassed and perplexed in their way to heaven. Nothing escapes

the malice of this enemy. If he cannot ruin, he will annoy; if he cannot tempt to great sins, he will seduce into small ones; if he cannot absolutely destroy Christian exertion, he will attempt to lessen it; if he cannot keep the servant of God from doing good, he will cause, if possible, *his good to be evil spoken of*; if he cannot prevent his final salvation, he will sap his comfort, and impede his activity and usefulness.

THE CONSEQUENCES of temptations are often dreadful. Why should I display to you the garden of Eden, and all the endless woe which temptation there produced? Why should I remind you of Noah, Lot, and Sampson? Why of Abraham or of Moses? Why of David or of Solomon? Why of Hezekiah or of Peter? Where can we look around us without seeing the wrecks and fragments of the storm on the surface of the waves? What has not human corruption, excited by temptation, done? What sin has it not occasioned? What havoc has it not made, and is it not making, in the world? What imperfections and scandals does it not introduce into the church? How many apparently devout and holy men, how many eminent and useful ministers, has it not overthrown? How soon are the best Christians misled and blinded, when they place themselves within reach of *temptation*? How rapidly and yet craftily does Satan spread his snares and decoy

the soul? Where, where can we turn without shame and affliction? Who can look into his own heart without trembling for himself? Who can cast an eye on the state of the Church without being filled with grief? How many, like Lot's wife, stand as monuments of the deceitfulness and power of temptation? The very name of it makes a humble and observant Christian shudder with the recollection of what he has himself suffered in past conflicts, and under the impression of the danger to which he is still exposed.

Let us then consider,

II. THE FORCE OF THE PETITION OF OUR TEXT, *Lead us not into temptation.*

Here it will be first necessary to inquire in WHAT MANNER GOD MAY BE SAID TO LEAD MEN INTO TEMPTATION. Temptation itself, in the sense in which we are considering it, cannot be attributed to Him. *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.* To make Him in any way, even the most remote, the author of sin, is to subvert the foundations of all religion, and to traduce the divine perfections. We must not, even in our thoughts, impute the fault of our crimes to the infinitely holy God. He never introduces evil into our hearts, nor excites it by any po-

sitive influence. *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts ; let the whole earth be filled with his glory.*

But God is said in Sacred Scripture to lead men into temptation, when he permits the tempter to exercise his arts. For, as all creatures are in his hand, none can act without his permission. Thus events are sometimes expressed in Scripture as if they were done by the Almighty, when Satan is the real agent: *The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.* 2 Sam. xxiv. 1. The parallel passage, 1 Chron. xxi. 1, is, *And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.* God permitted this, as the wise and holy Governor of the universe, to punish the sins of the people ; Satan did it as the enemy of David maliciously tempting him to moral evil in order to destroy him. In like manner God suffered the devil to tempt Job, and to vex Saul, and to send a lying spirit into the prophets of Ahab.

God, again, is said to lead us into temptation, when we are placed, in the course of his providence, in such circumstances, that Satan gains an easy advantage over us. Some events so alter our station and duties, that our inward corruptions and the temptations of the devil assault us in a new and more formidable manner.

God may permit these circumstances to arise, in order to prove the reality and power of our religion, to show the sincerity or deficiency of our love, to convince us of the remaining corruption of our hearts, to humble and prepare us for prosperity or adversity, to excite constant watchfulness and prayer, to dispose and enable us to instruct and benefit others, and to exercise and perfect our faith and patience. In other cases, God may send these trials in the severity of his anger, as the punishment of former sins, as the consequence of incorrigible obstinacy, and perhaps as the heralds of approaching ruin.

Accordingly, with this clear understanding that the blessed God is in no evil sense the author of sin, we may safely say that Joseph, the old prophet of Bethel, David, Solomon, and Peter were severally *led into temptation*. In these and similar cases, God was pleased to allow the person about to be tried, to fall into such circumstances as would give Satan and his followers the opportunity of assailing him, and would allow the governing principles of the mind to show themselves in their full force; even as *in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, God left Hezekiah to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart.*

The import, then, of the petition which we are to consider will now be obvious. It is, that

*God to know all our words, thoughts, and actions
I presume He left it to be known that the
ambassadors might know all that was in his heart.*

the events of our lives may be so ordered as not to display to us those objects, or provide those occasions, by which Satan may prevail over us and betray us into sin.

It is to be considered, then, as the prayer of one who FEELS A SINCERE HATRED OF SIN, AND A SOLICITUDE NOT TO BE ENTANGLED IN ITS SNARES. The bent and turn of the mind of a true Christian is opposed to all sin. He repents of his past offences, and abhors himself as the perpetrator of them. His great object and concern is, to believe in the meritorious death of Christ, to be deeply sensible of his love, to obey his commandments, to have fellowship with him by his Spirit. His anxious care therefore will be to avoid all the occasions of temptation. He dreads it as a serpent in his path. He trembles at its entrance into his heart, like a man discovering for the first time the symptoms of a malignant fever. He earnestly and unceasingly beseeches of God to grant him his protection, that he may not be betrayed into sin. He is sensible how readily he may be turned aside like an unfaithful bow, and is always conscious of his own feebleness and impotence.

This petition also implies an ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF OUR OWN WEAKNESS and inability to overcome temptation. The Christian is like a man only partially recovered from a dangerous

sickness, and who is afraid of a relapse. Sin has still too easy an access to his heart. His necessary duties in life expose him to continual trials. He fervently begs of God, therefore, not to expose him to any unnecessary scenes of difficulty. He knows how little force is requisite to overthrow him; he is aware that the least enemy is more than he can encounter of himself; and therefore, like a prudent warrior, he avoids a rash provoking of his foe. Already does he feel himself *ready to halt*; already does he find that he is *feeble and sore broken*. Shall he then be careless or indolent? Shall he venture needlessly on forbidden ground? Shall he act a presumptuous part? Whilst he feels his weakness, shall he not watch and pray against temptation?

We ask further in this petition, that God would not BRING US INTO THOSE SITUATIONS WHICH HE KNOWS WILL PROVE RUINOUS TO US. We are ignorant and impatient creatures; discovering little of the real tendency of things; and eager for change and variety. We desire ease, indulgence, worldly power, prosperity, riches. We readily acquiesce in all proposals which promise greater measures of influence and authority. Our imagination is soon caught by pleasing appearances. This is the natural bias of our hearts, which remains more or less even after true regeneration and conversion;

weakened indeed and vanquished, but not wholly destroyed. The Christian, therefore, humbly prays that God would not place him in a state which would irritate the slumbering evils of his nature; which would throw him off his guard; which would impart to some particular passion a new and dangerous force; which would confirm some evil habit; which would draw off the heart from God; which would expose him to those temptations which experience has shown him he cannot easily surmount. Thus he prays in effect, against success in his most favourite schemes, against prosperity in his concerns, against the favour and applause of men, against the increase of riches, and even against uninterrupted health, if God sees that they would expose him to any peculiar or fatal temptations.

The petition imports further an earnest desire that, in those temptations which befall us, God would NOT LEAVE US TO OURSELVES, BUT ASSIST US WITH HIS ALMIGHTY AID. We are sensible of our danger, and our need of mercy and *grace to help in every time of need*. We therefore pray that *no temptation may happen to us, but what is common to man*; and that God of his faithfulness would *not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, but would with the temptation also make a way for escape, that we may be able to bear it*. Joseph had to

withstand a more powerful temptation than David; yet he was brought off victorious; whilst David, *the man after God's own heart, the sweet Psalmist of Israel*, sunk too easily under the trial, entailed on himself and his family irretrievable shame and misery; and, notwithstanding his subsequent contrition, went down with sorrow to the grave. We are humbly to pray, therefore, for constant supplies of efficacious grace under the temptations which may assault us; that God would *uphold us with his free Spirit, and deliver us from every evil work, and preserve us to his heavenly kingdom. Mine eyes are ever unto the Lord*, says the Psalmist, *that he may pluck my feet out of the net.*

The prayer implies, lastly, that God would be pleased TO SAVE US IN THAT HOUR WHICH IS CALLED IN SCRIPTURE, THE HOUR OF TEMPTATION; in that crisis when temptation arises to its greatest height; when preceding negligence and repeated attacks have given it an accumulated force; and when concurring circumstances aid its last and fearful assault. Then *the enemy cometh in like a flood*. Solicitations to some fleshly lust, to some sensual, covetous, or ambitious project, or to some act dishonourable to God and destructive to the purity and peace of the soul, have perhaps been long and secretly at work. The Christian's resolutions have been insensibly weakened. His imagination has been

inflamed with the desire of attaining the sinful object. His fidelity and constancy have been shaken. At length the temptation comes. His judgment is obscured, his will is unstable, his affections are engaged by forbidden objects: thus shrouded in darkness and misguided by concupiscence, he is entangled in snares, or exposed to perils, from which a miracle of grace can alone extricate him. In these circumstances the hour of temptation may be said to have arrived. Now it presses hard upon his soul. Now *lust hath conceived and is bringing forth sin*. Into this state of imminent danger, therefore, we pray we may never be permitted to fall. We beg of God to keep us from the first approaches to it; to search and try our hearts, to give us the light and strength of his Spirit, that we may perceive our real state; that we may cut off the offending right hand, or pluck out the offending right eye; that *our souls may escape as a bird out of the snare of the fowler*; that *the snare may be broken and we may be delivered*.

In drawing towards a conclusion, allow me to urge upon you from this subject,

I. THE DUTY OF HUMILITY. *Be ye clothed*, saith the Apostle, *with humility, for God resisteth the proud and giveth grace unto the humble*. If there be any lesson which the con-

sideration of the text directly suggests, it is that of cultivating a lowly and meek spirit. For how corrupt are our hearts! How much exposed to temptation! How unfaithful to duty! How prone to listen to external solicitations! How soon thrown off their guard! We carry about with us, as it were, a traitor, in conspiracy with our external enemies. The deepest humility therefore becomes us.

Besides, how frequently have we fallen, and upon slight temptations! How often have we violated our resolutions, forgotten our vows, and broken our covenant with our God! And though we may have been preserved from outward acts of sin, yet how much has temptation defiled our thoughts and affections! Of how much secret inclination to iniquity are we conscious!

Further, the number and art of our spiritual enemies is an argument for cultivating this guardian virtue. For who would be proud and self-confident and daring, amidst a host of subtle and malignant and powerful foes; especially when presumption on our own strength opens a way for temptation, breaks down all our defences, and throws wide the gates to the assailants?

Moreover, humility is necessary, because so long a period must elapse before we can know any thing fully, adequately, experimentally,

maturely of our own hearts and the devices of Satan. We learn things at first generally and superficially. We hear of temptation, of our fallen nature, of the powers of darkness; but we understand little about them. Humility then must supply the place of knowledge, and distrust of ourselves protect us, where experience is wanting.

Besides, humility is the last finish and greatest ornament of the Christian character. Humility, not in word or profession, but actual and sincere lowliness of heart, is the groundwork of every other grace, the test, the fruit, the preservative, the distinguishing garment of piety. It is a duty more especially becoming the young; not to the exclusion of zeal and faith and hope and love and joy, but as the check and guardian of them. Without it, young persons are repulsive and offensive in society, they easily become the prey of temptation, and speedily *turn aside from the holy commandment*. Without it, there can be no hope of recovery from transgression, no openness to reproof, no docility, no desire of escape from the occasions of sin, no capacity of improvement in true piety, no genuine, solid, scriptural, well-ordered religion.

But we may proceed to notice,

II. THE NECESSITY OF CHRISTIAN VIGILANCE.

The prayer of our text implies the need of watchfulness. *Watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation.* To pray not to be led into temptation, and then to rise from our knees and live negligently and without a holy vigilance, is a mockery of God. We solemnly bind ourselves by prayer to do all in our power to attain the blessings we supplicate. We must pray, as though every thing depended on God alone, and nothing could be done by us; and we must watch, as though all rested upon our personal diligence, and God without it would neither bring us help, nor grant us the victory. The grace of God enables his servants *to will and to do of his good pleasure*; but he works by means, by exciting our own activity, and by quickening us to humility and watchfulness. *He that is born of God KEEPETH HIMSELF, and that wicked one toucheth him not.*

Every Christian, then, must be vigilant. He must deal with his heart, as a man would act towards a servant, whom he believed, upon credible information, to be secretly unfaithful. He must watch as a sentinel on his post, who knows that dangers are near, and that if the soldier sleeps, the enemy may safely make his attack. He must therefore *walk circumspectly, keep under his body and bring it into subjection, and avoid even the appearance of evil.* He must be sober and *temperate in all*

things, that his moderation may appear unto all men. He must religiously examine even the things which seem the most safe. He must take the alarm the first moment he perceives any approbation of sin stealing upon his mind. He must not in the smallest thing give place to the devil, but resist him manfully, steadfast in the faith.

And here a reply may be given to two cases of conscience :

Young persons sometimes ask, WHETHER THEY MAY, FROM CURIOSITY, READ OCCASIONALLY SUCH BOOKS, OR LISTEN TO SUCH INSTRUCTIONS, OR FREQUENT SUCH SOCIETY AS THEY ARE AWARE MAY HAVE A TENDENCY TO CORRUPT THEIR MINDS FROM THE SIMPLICITY OF SCRIPTURAL TRUTH AND CHRISTIAN OBEDIENCE. The obvious answer is, No,—unless a very clear call of duty demands it of you. It must not be done to gratify curiosity, but to fulfil some positive obligation. And as such calls of duty are very rare, it can rarely be lawful for you thus to expose yourself. Shall a person in tender health intrust himself to an infected atmosphere? Shall we venture to walk on to the very edge of the precipice? Shall we try how much poison our constitution will sustain? Shall we prefer a mixture of unwholesome food to the unadulterated *milk of the word*? Can we hope that God will keep us from temptation, if we rush into it of ourselves? Are we not too weak, far too

weak, to tamper with error, to trust ourselves to listen to its syren voice, or to covet, spontaneously and with alacrity, suspicious gratifications?

But you reply that you wish to PROVE ALL THINGS, THAT YOU MAY HOLD FAST THAT WHICH IS GOOD. If this be, indeed, the simple truth, the case is altered. You no longer read the book, or hear the discourse, or enter the supposed society, from curiosity, but with the honest desire of knowing, that you may obey, the truth. Be on your guard, however, lest you deceive yourself in this supposition. The probability is, that you know the truth in its main branches already, and therefore that you have no real plea for such hazardous pursuit of further knowledge. Conscience tells you this; and yet you remain unsatisfied. Beware of a fastidious taste, lest you mistake morbid delicacy for refinement of mind :—the healthful appetite does not pine after luxuries and variety. *Stand fast in the faith. Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrine. Avoid foolish questions and contentions as unprofitable and vain.*

But you say that THE INSTRUCTIONS WHICH YOU WISH TO HEAR ARE REPORTED TO HAVE MANY EXCELLENCIES, AND TO CONTAIN AT LEAST A LARGE MIXTURE OF TRUTH. Perhaps we may reply, So much the worse. The tempter may be

transformed into an angel of light. The poison may be mixed up with wholesome nourishment. There would be comparatively little danger to an enlightened mind, in the contemplation of gross and unmingled error. Therefore *watch and pray.* No one can tell with what taint he may rise from reading a book, or listening to a discourse, *which causes to err from the ways of righteousness.* No one can tell but he may thereby *grieve the Spirit of God,* and provoke him to *give him up to his own heart's lust, and to let him follow his own devices.* Let no one presume to amuse himself with deviations from truth, lest he be found to trifle with God.

But a second case may be proposed—MAY I OCCASIONALLY RESORT TO THE COMPANY AND AMUSEMENTS OF SOMEWHAT WORLDLY PERSONS? If indispensable duty throws you into their society, you must submit to it as the will of God; but to prefer their company, is an unquestionable indication of a worldly spirit. You thereby run unnecessarily into temptation. You quench the Spirit. You lose your time. You expose your imagination and thoughts to be corrupted. You open the way for further allurements. You likewise encourage others in a worldly course. You indispose yourself for prayer and devotion. You lower your standard of piety, and are in danger of declining from God. Nay, the very inquiry shows that you have already begun to decline from him. How can a Christian, who occa-

sionally frequents the diversions and pleasures of the world, be said to *do all things, both in word and deed, in the name of the Lord Jesus?* How can he *redeem time, walk circumspectly, escape from conformity to this world, and be transformed in the renewing of his mind?* A Christian ought to have no taste for the world, no relish for *the husks*, so to speak, *which the swine do eat*. His heart should be fixed on Christ, on duty, and on heaven. He ought to have his affections devoted to God. Does he pray *not to be led into temptation*, and shall he wilfully rush into it? He has by nature a powerful bias towards earthly things, shall he run the risk of augmenting it? He has a traitorous heart, shall he allow it to parley with the enemy? He has much difficulty in making any progress towards heaven, shall he increase the difficulty? He professes to run the race of his high calling, shall he voluntarily turn aside from that course? He professes a desire to *lay aside every weight*, shall he burden himself with additional impediments? He says he wishes to grow in grace, shall he stop in his progress? He appears to have *put his hand to the plough*, shall he *look back?*

But I propose, lastly,

III. SOME TOPICS OF CONSOLATION TO THE
HUMBLE AND WATCHFUL CHRISTIAN.

Let such an one remember that the prayer, *Lead us not into temptation*, implies that NO TEMPTATION CAN ASSAULT US WITHOUT GOD'S PERMISSION. He notices and orders all, knows the way that you take, follows you with his eye, and has designs of holy love to accomplish in all your trials. It is surely a great relief to the tempted and harassed Christian, who is endeavouring in humility and vigilance to resist temptation, to know that all is right; that Satan is under the control of God, and cannot touch even a hair of our head without His permission.

Think also on the PROMISE to which we have already alluded, that *no temptation shall happen unto you, but what is common to man; but that God will, with the temptation also, make a way for your escape, that you may be able to bear it*. God may see fit to allow you to be led into circumstances of severe temptation; but if you adopt the prayer of the text, he will not leave you under them, he will not permit them to overwhelm you, will bring you needful succour, and will deliver you from all your fears. If it was our Saviour himself who taught his disciples thus to pray, then HE WILL ASSUREDLY REMEMBER THEM IN THE CONFLICT. He is *not an high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, and yet without sin*. He

suffered being tempted, that he might be able to succour them that are tempted. Let the distressed and afflicted Christian trust his compassionate Master in the darkest moment. He will assuredly *cover his head in the day of battle.*

Recollect again, that this petition implies that YOU FIGHT UNDER THE EXPRESS NOTICE AND APPROBATION OF THE CAPTAIN OF YOUR SALVATION. Now the sight of the leader animates the soldier. Our almighty Saviour not only permits every temptation, but he notices and assists the humblest efforts of his sincere servants. He looks upon them with love; observes how the battle proceeds; watches every movement of the foe; listens to the prayer of the wearied combatants—he *hears their cry and will save them.*

Consider, also, even when temptation has prevailed, that THE BLOOD OF THIS SAME DIVINE SAVIOUR CLEANSETH FROM ALL SIN. In the hour of conscious weakness, and defeat, and disquietude, let the atoning sacrifice of your Saviour be your comfort. Plead his death; apply his reconciliation; and rely upon his righteousness. The defilement which you contract will not be deadly, whilst in daily repentance and faith you *wash in this fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness.*

Forget not, further, that ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR YOUR GOOD, *if you love God and*

are called according to his purpose. The trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, will be found unto praise and honour and glory. These sharp temptations may serve to humble you, to promote watchfulness, to teach you dependence on grace alone, to show you what you are, to produce experience of the divine goodness and faithfulness, to exalt the Saviour in your esteem, and to prepare you for the peace and holiness of heaven.

Lastly, LOOK FORWARD TO THE HOPE OF VICTORY. You shall soon, if humble and faithful, be made *more than a conqueror through Him that hath loved you. Hold on in your course. To him that overcometh, saith the Saviour, will I give to sit down with me on my throne, even as I have overcome, and am set down with my Father on his throne. Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord hath prepared for them that love him. God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. Soon you shall say, with the triumphant Apostle, I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day, and not to*

me only, but to all them that love his appearing. Look upwards to the heavenly host, and ask with St. John, Who are these which are arrayed in white robes, and whence come they? The answer shall be—and let it animate you in all your trials—These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple, and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

SERMON XX.

THE TENDENCY OF ALL EVENTS TO THE
TRUE CHRISTIAN.

PHILIPPIANS, I. 19.

*For I know that this shall turn to my salvation,
through your prayer, and the supply of the
Spirit of Jesus Christ.*

THE consideration of the providence of God, which orders all the events of the world, is a source of consolation to the sincere Christian. He finds himself often in the midst of difficulties, from which no human prudence can deliver him. His most sacred designs for the divine glory are at times impeded and frustrated. The perverseness of the adversaries of true religion, combines with the mistakes of its friends and the imbecility and defects of his own mind, to involve him in perplexity. Under such circumstances, his relief is in the wise and gracious care of his heavenly Father, who knows and who controls all the affairs of his servants, and who can bring order and success out of the confused and apparently inextricable tumult of human passions.

This appears to have been the resource of St. Paul in the peculiar afflictions to which the text refers. He was at the time when he wrote it, a prisoner at Rome, for the name of Jesus Christ. Some false apostles took this opportunity of opposing his designs, undermining his authority, and sowing divisions in the church. To this end they *preached Christ out of envy and strife*, aiming to promote contention even by the Gospel of peace. Possibly they were teachers who concealed some part of their real sentiments, and preached for a time the substance of the Gospel, in order to form a party against the Apostle, and gradually impose the Mosaic ritual on the Gentile converts. In these painful trials, St. Paul remained unmoved. He rejoiced that, *notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ was preached*. This satisfied him as to the effect produced upon other persons: and as to himself, he knew it would help forward his final salvation by promoting his humility, spirituality, and meetness for heaven, through the ardent prayers of the Philippians on his behalf, and the gracious supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Thus in both respects he had just reason to leave every thing, without extreme solicitude, in the hands of God. *His earnest expectation and his hope were, that he should in nothing be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so then also, Christ*

should be magnified in his body, whether it were by life or by death. This was his great object, his prevailing desire, his deliberate purpose, his first duty, and his highest interest ; for *to him to live was Christ, and to die was gain.*

The sentiment, then, of the text appears to be, that the most distressing events will advance the ultimate salvation of the true Christian, through the means of prayer to God and the supply of the Holy Spirit of Christ.

In considering this subject, we must notice,

I. The confident hope of the humble Christian—*I know that this shall turn to my salvation.*

II. The particular manner in which this hope will be accomplished—*through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.*

I. The confident hope of the humble Christian is, that every trial, however apparently adverse, will assuredly conduce to his final salvation.

SALVATION is the deliverance of fallen man from sin and all its consequences, by the stupendous sacrifice and grace of Jesus Christ. The meritorious cause of it, is exclusively the obedience unto death of the eternal Son of God. He is the Saviour. *His name was expressly called Jesus, because he was to save his people from their sins.* His sacrifice upon the cross was the price of our redemption ; *neither is*

there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby they must be saved. The application of this great salvation, in its full extent, is gradual. Justification, the first and principal blessing of it, is obtained by receiving with a true and lively faith, the testimony of God concerning his Son. By grace we are saved through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God. Thus we are pardoned and justified, reconciled to God and accepted as righteous in his sight. Our guilt is cancelled, our iniquities are blotted out, and our consciences are appeased. This is indeed so distinguished a part of our salvation, and is so immediately connected with every other part, that the true believer is frequently spoken of as already actually saved. We are saved and called with an holy calling. We are saved by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. We are saved by grace. The grace of God bringeth salvation. The gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. The Holy Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus. In these passages, salvation is described as already conferred on us, because the first part of it, the remission of sins, is so ; and because this blessing is united with the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit from which faith springs, and leads

on to all the other parts of sanctification, by which salvation is to be completed.

There are VARIOUS MEANS which God has appointed for carrying on the salvation thus begun, and for perfecting it in the full felicity and purity of body and soul in heaven. These methods are of two sorts. The one may be said to be in the hands of God, the other in our own. Those in the hands of God are the events of his providence, and the communications of his Spirit; those in ours are watchfulness, mortification, and prayer, with all the other graces and duties of the Christian life. These several means tend to advance the final salvation of the true penitent, to give him the peace which flows from justification, to deliver him more and more from sin, to guard him from temptation, to make him a partaker of God's holiness, to increase his love to Christ, his separation from the world, his humility and his joy.

Salvation, in its comprehensive sense, is thus a progressive work, always defective in this world, and only perfected when every sin in the heart and life shall be destroyed, when all its consequences shall be removed, and the work, which was begun by the gift of pardon in the blood of Christ, and the regeneration of the Holy Ghost, shall be completed in the full fruition of God in heaven. It is in this way that men are saved. Justification and sanctification are

equally parts of the great blessing. *We are from the beginning chosen to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, whereunto we are called by the Gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are to work out this our salvation with fear and trembling.* As an encouragement and help in doing this, it is added, that *we are kept through the power of God through faith unto salvation.* The afflictions of ministers are often for the consolation and salvation of their hearers. *To them that look for him, Christ will appear the second time unto salvation.* Salvation, in these and many other passages, is spoken of as a future event, which is connected with progressive holiness, which is to be wrought out with fear and trembling, and which is to be expected at the second advent of Christ.

In this view, it is obvious that the most distressing events, like that referred to by the Apostle, may TURN TO OUR SALVATION, that is, may fall in with the great design of divine mercy, and conduce to the entire recovery of our souls from the ruins of the fall. Even the holy Apostle himself needed this discipline. He had at one time *a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure.* At another, *his God humbled him amongst the Corinthians; whilst in his constant course, he had to keep under his body and*

bring it into subjection, lest by any means, after he had preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away. His afflictions necessities and distresses, his stripes and imprisonment, his labours watchings and fastings, were all unquestionably designed to promote his growth in grace, his humility, simplicity, patience, contentment, thankfulness, resignation, and separation from the world; his sense of dependence upon God, his desires after heaven, and his love to Christ and his cross. In all these respects, then, they *turned to his salvation.*

Indeed, we cannot fail to observe in the histories of the Saints of God as recorded in Scripture, that their various afflictions materially aided them in their way toward heaven. David went astray before he was afflicted, but afterwards he kept God's word. Doubtless the same was the case also with Job, who thus learned to abhor himself, and to repent in dust and ashes; and with Joseph, into whose *soul the iron had entered*; and with Jacob, who learned to look back with gratitude upon the past, and to acknowledge that even in that most adverse event, the loss of Joseph, Jehovah had, in fact, surpassed all his expectations or desires. Thus *all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to his purpose.* The trying of our faith *worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience*

hope. Our light afflictions work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us and we gave them reverence; shall we not then much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits and live?

And if this be the tendency of all trials and temptations generally, it is more peculiarly the tendency of the more PAINFUL AND SEVERE. The particular affliction to which the Apostle refers in the text was of this nature. It touched him in the most tender point, for all his affections were bound up in the prosperity of the Gospel of Christ. His apostolical authority had been committed to him by the Saviour himself, and the exercise of it was connected with the true grace of God in which the churches stood, and was opposed by those only who secretly wished to bring in another Gospel. Thus every thing concurred to quicken his feelings on this subject. He was, besides, at this time, a prisoner, and therefore doubtless more susceptible on any questions which tended to subvert the faith of his converts, and lessen his own just influence over them. And yet in this very point his trials arose. Men entered the church, and *preached Christ of envy and strife, expressly to add affliction to his bonds.* They opposed his authority, and troubled the peace and union of the whole body of the faithful. They corrupted

the doctrine of salvation, and endangered the souls of their hearers. This then was the very affliction which would of all others most severely press upon his mind. And yet this he was assured would *turn to his salvation*; because this he knew would most effectually wean him from himself, take him off from dependence on the creature, place his entire reliance on the divine grace, mortify the remaining pride and selfishness of his heart, teach him his own insufficiency and weakness, increase his value of Christ and his salvation, and quicken his ardent longings after the peace and purity of heaven. Other afflictions, which did not affect him so nearly, would obviously have this tendency in only a proportionably lower degree. It is disappointment in the favourite object, which loosens the soul from earth, and draws it more powerfully towards Christ and heaven.

It has been thus with the sincere servants of God in every age. Jonah must mourn over his withered gourd. Hannah must long remain childless. David must fly from his throne. Jacob must lose his beloved Rachel. Abraham must offer up Isaac,—even *he that had received the promises, his only begotten son*. God knows the most tender part, and suits his providences to our temptations and our necessities. The very thing which our disposition, our turn of mind, our duties and pursuits make most dear

to us, he will sometimes smite, on purpose that we may adequately feel the stroke. Thus we learn to subdue an excessive passion, to be separated from the creature, to know our own hearts, to die to the world, and to live by faith in closer union with Christ our Lord. No created thing ought to be essential to our happiness. When general afflictions have been applied in vain, some more piercing and appropriate calamity is often suffered to arrive, in order to leave such a deep and abiding impression, as may produce in us *afterwards the peaceable fruits of righteousness.*

This effect, however, is not always obvious and direct. The expression, *I know that this shall turn to my salvation*, seems to imply that such a consequence shall eventually take place, though things may appear for a time to have a very different tendency. Afflictions may seem rather to threaten to injure and retard our salvation; they may be brought about by wicked instruments; much that is connected with them may be criminal and sinful, so far as the agents themselves are concerned; they may for a time excite distrust and unbelief and murmurs in our minds; they may remove us from the means of grace, may expose us to peculiar temptation, may check our joy in religion and paralyse our exertions, may deprive us of the occasion of doing much good, may lessen our strength and

capacities for the service of God, and abridge our influence over others; and yet at length they may turn and fall out, unexpectedly perhaps, and even wonderfully, to our final benefit. They may be diverted from their apparently natural tendency, and be guided to a new and surprising event. *Out of the eater, to apply the proverbial expression, may come forth meat, and out of the strong may come forth sweetness.* Like the component parts of an efficacious medicine, they may lose their distinct and proper qualities, and be so modified by combination, that they shall exert new agencies, and produce effects of a higher and more important order. The Christian may not remark this operation for a long time; in some instances he may never be able to discern it: but yet, the process is not the less sure. He may think a particular trial to be decidedly hostile to his best interests, and to be approaching him as an enemy; but ere long, like Esau when coming to meet Jacob, it shall forget, as it were, its fierceness, and embrace him with the tenderness of a brother.

Nothing could seem to be more unlikely for the good of the Apostle Paul, than the envy and divisions occasioned by the false teachers; and yet God ordained them for his salvation. Nothing could appear more unpromising to Joseph than the jealousy of his brethren, his being

sold to the Ishmaelites, his removal to Egypt, his being falsely accused by the wife of Potiphar, and then cast into prison and forgotten. How could these events be capable of promoting Joseph's salvation? Yet they doubtless humbled him before God, prepared him for his future elevation, protected him from the pride of power, and guarded him in the court of Pharaoh. Who can say that there was any part of these dispensations which was not absolutely necessary, in the order of means, to his reaching heaven? We are so full of folly and perverseness and worldliness, so subject to declension in religion, so apt to be languid and cold and formal, so ready to relapse into temptation, so prone to choose a flowery path rather than a safe one, so little able to judge of our dangers and our enemies, that we should inevitably depart from our God, if his gracious care did not order and direct the affairs of life, so as to promote, not perhaps our fancy but our benefit, not our feelings but our graces, not our fond schemes and projects but our attention to our heavenly vocation, not the interests of time but of eternity, not our ease but our salvation. And surely if we resign ourselves, nay submit with gratitude, to salutary medical discipline, however painful or severe, much more should we lie patiently in the hands of that heavenly Physician who understands intimately all our

spiritual maladies, who perceives the tendency of our circumstances, who knows the stations to which he means to call us, and sees the indispensable necessity of preventing or checking the pride and vanity and self-confidence to which we are so greatly prone.

O infinite mystery of divine mercy, wisdom, and grace! O the unsearchable depths of the counsels of redemption! And is it then in this way, O our God and Saviour, that, unknown to us, thou art furthering our final salvation? How unfathomable is thy love, that, after the sacrifice of thy own life on the cross, thou hast condescendingly brought us to thyself by the secret energy of thy Spirit, and still guardest us in the ways of righteousness by thy providential control! And is it thus that thou leadest us, as thou didst Israel of old, in order to *humble us and to prove us, to know what is in our hearts, to do us good at our latter end?* Is it thus that thou *bringest us by a right way to a city of habitation?* O continue thy goodness and mercy to us! O leave us not to our own choice and our own wisdom! O administer to us such discipline as thou seest needful for us! O preserve us in thy faith, fear, and love, and “grant that, thou being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal.”

We now come to consider,

II. THE PARTICULAR MANNER IN WHICH THIS CONFIDENT HOPE OF THE HUMBLE CHRISTIAN WILL BE ACCOMPLISHED—*through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.*

The sanctifying effect of all events is produced by the mutual prayer of Christians for each other, and by the gracious influences of the Holy Ghost. The first is the appointed means, the second is the efficient cause. The first regards our duty, the second the influence of divine grace. The two are inseparably united. God gives his Spirit, ordinarily, in answer to prayer.

The effectual fervent prayer even of an individual Christian on behalf of others, *availeth much.* United supplications are yet more successful: for our Saviour has said, *If any two of you agree on earth, touching any thing ye shall ask, it shall be done unto you of my Father which is in heaven.* The intercessions therefore of all the several Christian churches for the Apostle Paul must have been eminently calculated to ensure the divine blessing upon him in his afflictive circumstances. This is implied in his language to them. He says to the Corinthians, *Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us; you also helping together by prayer for us.* And to the Ephesians, *Pray-*

ing always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints : and for me, that utterance may be given me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the Gospel ; for which I am an ambassador in bonds. He tells Philemon, Withal prepare me also a lodging, for I trust through your prayers I shall be given unto you. He exhorts the Thessalonians and the Hebrews, Brethren, pray for us.

THE CONSEQUENCE OF THIS FERVENT SUPPLICATION for St. Paul was that favourable direction of all the events in which he was concerned, which he was persuaded God would vouchsafe him. We are dependent for many blessings on each other, and God attaches to mutual prayer his highest graces. Now never was any one more beloved by the whole body of the faithful than the holy Apostle ; never was a closer intercourse of intercession maintained than between him and the several churches which he had planted. On his part he remembered each of them without ceasing in his prayers, he always laboured fervently for them in prayer, that they might stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. On their part, they ceased not to supplicate God for the Apostle. Thus a new tendency was given to the most painful occurrences in St. Paul's life,

and things apparently the most unfavourable, turned out to his benefit and final salvation.

A forcible example, amidst many others, of the blessing granted to united devotion is found in the case of another Apostle, St. Peter, when he was apprehended by Herod, and delivered to the care of four quaternions of soldiers. *Prayer was then made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.* In consequence of this, when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night the angel of the Lord delivered him out of his hand, and *from all the expectation of the people of the Jews*; and, as if to mark still more clearly the divine answer to mutual supplication, the rescued Apostle came to the house of Mary, at the very moment when *many were gathered together, praying.*

In like manner, the secret and mysterious providence of our heavenly Father still bestows his favours upon us IN REPLY TO OUR MUTUAL INTERCESSIONS. He thus unites us in closer ties of affection and dependence. As we are connected with each other in various ways, we call down on ourselves and those concerned with us, the mercy of God. Events, however distressing, are in this manner directed by an infallible guidance to the furtherance of our salvation. Thus the minister and the people, the magistrate and the private subject, the head of the family and his household, the husband and

the wife, the parents and the children, the master and the servant, whilst *they walk together as heirs of the grace of life*, promote each other's highest interests. Like the several parts of the human body, *if one member suffer, all the members suffer with it*. Prayer has a mighty effect in healing the little jealousies and disagreements which human infirmity occasions, and in quelling the rising disorder of irritated passions. When events, as they arise, are made the subjects, not of controversy, but of prayer; then afflictions excite sympathy, mistakes and errors receive forgiveness, meekness and forbearance are promoted, the Son of peace delights to dwell in the heart; and our gracious God vouchsafes to united supplication that superintending influence, by which all things are made to conspire eventually to our salvation.

It will not appear at all surprising that we have SO LITTLE OF THE BLESSING OF GOD ON OUR MINISTRY AND FAMILIES AND CONNEXIONS, WHEN WE CONSIDER HOW LITTLE THIS DEVOTIONAL TEMPER IS CULTIVATED. Our religion is oftentimes too much the religion of education, of habit, of taste, of system, of form, of display, of controversy, of any thing rather than the religion of prayer. A devout spirit is frequently little esteemed amidst our anxieties to settle difficult questions, and determine between conflicting sentiments. Family prayer is too often

a brief and languid service ; whilst secret prayer degenerates into a cold, uninteresting performance of unwelcome duty. And what is the consequence ? Praying little for our households, our children, our congregations, our friends, our families, our dependants, or the church of God ; the blessing which God has connected with the cordial and diligent performance of this duty, is of course withheld. Events, in the mean time, perpetually occur, which might have turned to our benefit, had they not, for want of a devotional spirit, been employed as occasions of pride, envy, selfishness, dispute, murmuring, and separation. Thus not only our salvation is not advanced by them, but the *things which should have been to our health, become unto us even an occasion of falling*. It is the humble and spiritual Christian alone who can entertain the holy confidence of the text, because he alone fulfils with anxious diligence the condition on which it is suspended.

This will be more evident if we consider the EFFICIENT CAUSE of this salutary tendency of events to the faithful Christian ; I mean, *the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ*. The way in which God is pleased to turn every thing to our salvation, is through the gracious aid of the Holy Ghost. This alone can make an affliction truly profitable. And prayer is the means of

accomplishing this effect, chiefly as it calls down upon us this heavenly influence.

The Holy Ghost is described as the SPIRIT OF JESUS CHRIST, because he proceeds from the Son, as well as from the Father, and because the more copious effusion of his grace was purchased by the atonement of Christ's death, and is bestowed by him, now that he has been *by the right hand of God exalted, and has received of the Father the gift of the Holy Ghost*. The Spirit is also Christ's representative on earth during his personal absence; he is *the Comforter, whom the Father hath sent in his name*. He glorifies Christ, by testifying of his person and work, revealing his salvation, and enabling the penitent by faith to appropriate and rejoice in its blessings. The Holy Ghost was *not given*, when our Saviour was on earth, *because that Jesus was not yet glorified*. But now, Christ being glorified, *because we are sons, God hath sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, so that, if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*.

It may even be said, that it is by THE SUPPLY OF THIS SPIRIT OF JESUS CHRIST that all events turn to our salvation, because it is by this supply alone that the Christian is enabled to bear them humbly, and learn from them the lessons they are designed to teach. Afflictions have in themselves no natural tendency to pro-

duce any holy effects. Indeed, so far from it, *the sorrow of the world worketh death*. Saul, in his trouble, perished on his own sword. Ahab, disappointed at Naboth's refusal, turned away his face and would eat no bread. Ahithophel, grieved at the rejection of his counsel, destroyed himself. Judas, tormented with an evil conscience, committed the like dreadful crime. Many professed Christians seem to go on well till *affliction or persecution arising because of the word*, they are entangled by the toils of Satan, their real character is disclosed, and partial or total apostacy ensues. Even the sincere Christian is far too weak to support an affliction, to use it to its right ends, or even to meet it at first with a suitable frame of heart, without the supply of the Holy Ghost. When this grace accompanies a calamitous visitation, then, and then only, does it soften, humble, and purify the soul; then only it exercises Christian virtues without overwhelming them, and tends to our salvation instead of our injury.

The expression, *a SUPPLY of the Spirit of Jesus Christ*, may seem to intimate that on every new occasion of difficulty, an additional communication of assistance is needful, in order to render that difficulty subservient to our final benefit. Our resources must correspond, through the mercy of God, with our necessities, or every thing will decline. Former supplies will not

avail us on new emergencies. Our faith soon fails, and our knowledge, our prudence, our fortitude, our resignation, our love, all quickly vanish, when fresh and unlooked-for trials arise. We then often find it impossible to apply our former experience and observation to the instant pressure. It is only by the further supply of continual strength from the Spirit of Christ, that we can maintain the conflict; and such a supply when vouchsafed, like the cooling stream to the exhausted traveller, refreshes and cheers and invigorates the soul. It secretly feeds the languid flame which seemed almost extinguished. Like *the dew of Hermon that descended on the Mount of Zion*, or like *the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even unto Aaron's beard, and went down to the skirts of his clothing*, it infuses life into the fainting spirit, rouses the drooping heart, and sustains it in the severest comba

The word which, in the text, is rendered *supply*, is considered by a great critic*, as signifying much more than an ordinary measure of assistance; as expressing the idea of a large supply, a provision of whatever is wanting to the Christian soldier, a collation of auxiliary force, a renewed subsidy of grace, an unusual succour derived from the invincible and infallible

* Dr. Isaac Barrow.

Spirit of God, a power from on high, a heavenly might, which comes in at the very crisis of affairs. For when the battle has long raged and appears almost lost, when the contest is at the very height, when faith begins to fail, the arm to sink, and the soul to tremble, then the super-added grace of the Spirit of Christ opportunely bestowed, turns the hitherto doubtful day. The warrior is renewed for the fight; the battle is carried; the victory is won.

It is thus that by the aid of mutual prayer and the efficient operation of the Spirit of Christ, the Christian derives profit from affliction, joy from tribulations, hope from trouble, and life from death. It is thus that the control of our gracious Father over events which are without us, combined with the holy operations of his blessed Spirit within us, carry us forward on our journey through this world to heaven. Providence thus concurs with grace; the external circumstance with the inward disposition: the man is fitted for the burden, and the strength for the exigency. What would ruin the soul, if left to its own weakness, tends to its salvation under the control of almighty power. What would otherwise overthrow our faith, now confirms it; what would separate us from God, unites us to him. Events acquire a new character, and turn to a new end. Mutual prayer is the medium of connexion between afflictions

and the supply of the Holy Ghost by which they are sanctified; it binds us to God and each other; it is an instrument of obtaining all our mercies, and a channel for conveying to us every grace.

If such, then, be the ineffable mercy of God to the true Christian, we may observe in conclusion,

I. THAT ALL EVENTS MAY BE EXPECTED TO TURN TO THE CONDEMNATION OF THE UNGODLY. For if we are not first interested by faith in the redemption of Christ Jesus, it is impossible that the afflictions we meet with, can promote the enjoyment of final salvation. The work not being begun, it obviously cannot be carried forward. Nor indeed are unconverted persons as yet entitled to these promises by which our gracious Saviour engages to order all his providences to the eternal good of those that love him. Till a man repents and believes the Gospel, all is against him—the law of God, the holiness of God, the truth of God, the word of God, and the very creatures of God. In fact, impenitent sinners are *of the works of the law*, and *under the curse*. The divine *wrath abideth on them*; *God is angry with them every day*. They almost invariably employ the incidents and troubles of life for their own ruin, by the corruption of their hearts and the disorder of their

passions. The afflictions which were designed by the Almighty to bring them to consideration and repentance, they abuse to their destruction. There is such a poison in sin, that it changes the nature of events, and infuses evil into every thing with which it is mingled. The blessings of Providence—health, talents, learning, beauty, riches, influence, success, authority, are all wasted and perverted. Even the means of grace—the Sabbath, the Bible, the prayers of the Church, the preaching of the Gospel, the Sacraments, are turned to the purposes of mere formality, or self-righteousness. This indeed must almost necessarily be the case with one whose *heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked*; one who lives without serious prayer either for himself or others; who has never implored the aid of the Holy Spirit to sanctify and bless a single circumstance of his life; who is a captive of sin and Satan, the sport of folly and passion, the enemy of God and goodness. Every thing must turn to the injury of such a person. *His judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and his damnation slumbereth not.* The anger of God is upon him *in the city and in the field; in his basket and in his store; in the fruit of his body and the fruit of his land; the increase of his kine and the flocks of his sheep; when he cometh in and when he goeth out.*

Awake then, I beseech you, my fellow-sinner, to the awful realities of your state. This, and infinitely worse than this, is your present condition. Yet there is hope; yet there is a Saviour; and, blessed be his name, *now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.* The circumstances by which you are surrounded cannot indeed, in your present state, turn to your final salvation in the sense in which we have been considering it; but they may *turn to your salvation* as to the FIRST RECEPTION OF THAT GREAT BLESSING IN THE PARDON OF YOUR SINS AND THE CONVERSION OF YOUR HEART TO GOD. If you are afflicted, let the afflictions which oppress you have this effect. Let them remind you of your fearful guilt, let them determine you to seek for justification through the merits of Christ. Raise a prayer to heaven for the illumination and graces and influence of the Holy Ghost. Perhaps this is the very moment for hopeful impression. Perhaps you are already beginning to reflect on the goodness of God which you have abused, and on his chastisements which you have slighted. You look around you. You see the world mouldering away—you feel the misery of a life of sin—you are called by some peculiar disappointment to solitude and consideration. Avail yourself then of the opportunity. Let these events *turn to your salvation.* Lose not the benefits of them

by a criminal delay. Make no further excuses. Pray to God for the Spirit of Jesus Christ to aid your feeble efforts; for he will not reject your prayer, but will give you all needful grace. Only begin; only be in earnest; only set out for heaven. God will never be wanting to you. *The Spirit and the bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come; and let him that is athirst, come; and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.*

But allow me to point out,

II. And finally, THE SECURITY AND HAPPINESS OF THE TRUE CHRISTIAN. We have seen that the effects of all events are just what God makes them to be. It is not therefore so much to outward circumstances that I would direct your attention, as to the inward temper of your heart. By *prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ* you can seek the beneficial use of all occurrences. What then are your fears? What your discouragements? What your disappointments? Let me direct you to your tender and faithful Lord. Pour all your solicitude and anguish at his feet. Repose, like the beloved disciple, on his bosom. Though you are perplexed, and harassed, and dejected, though *without are fightings, and within are fears*, though Satan assault you with perturbation of spirit and fierce suggestions, as with

fiery and poisoned arrows, though unreasonable and wicked men prevail for a time against you, though your own schemes have all failed, and you perceive no possibility of relief, yet sink not into despair. You cannot perhaps pray as you would wish for yourself; but your family, your friends, your ministers, the whole church are interceding for you. Your Saviour is all-wise and all-powerful. Your case cannot baffle his skill or fail to receive his notice. He marks all your trials, and can send you in a subsidiary strength, a large supply of his Spirit. He can *make even the wrath of man to praise him, and the remainder of it he can restrain.* All nature is under his control. The deliverances which he wrought in a miraculous manner of old, he can repeat in the ordinary and secret process of his providence. Bright days shall return. The dark night shall usher in the morn. *Cast not then away your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward.* Believe your Redeemer's power; wait his pleasure; *He will never leave you nor forsake you. Be still, and know that he is God.* Imbibe the spirit of the Apostle, in the verses connected with the text. *Your earnest expectation and your hope shall not be disappointed. You shall in nothing be ashamed. Be not then terrified with your adversaries, which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God. Christ shall*

be magnified in your body, whether by life or by death. For you to live shall be Christ and to die be gain.

“Blessed for ever and ever be that mother’s child,” says the judicious Hooker, “whose faith hath made him the child of God! The earth may shake, the pillars of the world may tremble under us, the countenance of the heaven may be appalled, the sun may lose his light, the moon her beauty, the stars their glory; but concerning the man that trusted in God, if the fire have proclaimed itself unable as much as to singe a hair of his head, if lions, beasts ravenous by nature and keen with hunger, being set to devour, have as it were religiously adored the very flesh of the faithful man, what is there in the world that shall change his heart, overthrow his faith, alter his affection towards God, or the affection of God to him? If I be of this note, who shall make a separation between me and my God? *Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No: I am persuaded that neither tribulation, nor anguish, nor persecution, nor famine, nor nakedness, nor peril, nor sword, nor death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor power, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall ever so far prevail over me. I know in whom I have believed; I am not ignorant whose pre-*

cious blood hath been shed for me; I have a Shepherd full of kindness, full of care, and full of power; unto him I commit myself; his own finger hath engraven this sentence in the tables of my heart, *Satan hath desired to winnow thee as wheat, but I have prayed that thy faith fail not.* Therefore, the assurance of my hope I will labour to keep, as a jewel, unto the end; and by labour, through the gracious mediation of his prayer, I shall keep it *."

* Hooker's Works, vol. iii. p. 534. Oxford edition, 1807.

SERMON XXI.

THE TRIUMPH OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTER.

2 CORINTHIANS, II. 14.

Now thanks be unto God which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.

It is a peculiar encouragement to the Christian minister to contemplate the example of the holy Apostles; for, whatever difficulties he may now meet with in the discharge of his high office, he perceives that they were assailed by much greater. He knows also that the power of divine grace is not less at the present time, than at the first propagation of the Gospel. He believes that the doctrine of the cross of Christ remains the same; and that, though the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit have long ceased, yet that his ordinary and most important operations still continue in the church. He hopes therefore,—to recur to the allusion in the text,—that he may also be carried forward, in some measure like the Apostle, in a spiritual triumph, whilst the vivifying fragrance of the

knowledge of Christ is scattered around him as he proceeds.

The immediate occasion of Saint Paul's expressing this sentiment were the glad tidings which he had received of the church at Corinth, together with the *door opened to him of the Lord at Troas*. These auspicious circumstances drew forth from him the striking expressions of gratitude and praise which we are now to consider.

We may notice then,

I. The Christian minister's triumph.

II. The special blessing which he communicates.

III. The gratitude which he offers to God for it.

I. THE CHRISTIAN MINISTER'S TRIUMPH—

Now thanks be to God which always causeth us to triumph in Christ.

The Roman triumph to which the Apostle refers, is well known. It was the celebration of a victory gained in war. The procession advanced through the streets of Rome to the Capitol, conducting the successful general and his army; whilst the attendant captives followed the triumphal car. The altars smoking with incense, and the applauses and benedictions of the multitude, proclaimed its approach. Thus the Apostle describes himself as led, from city to city, from province to province, in a mo-

ral triumph over the powers of darkness and the idolatrous opposition of the heathen world, whilst the name and grace of Christ his Saviour, as a sweet savour of life, was diffused wherever he came. The Christian minister also in every age partakes, in his more limited measure, of a like exultation, in proportion as vice and ignorance are overcome, and the spiritual dominion of Satan is vanquished and destroyed.

For if the idea of a triumph implies that there has been a CONQUEST achieved, surely the success of the Gospel of Christ has now, as well as in the days of St. Paul, the best title to this distinction. For what is conversion to God but the submission of the understanding and will of fallen sinners to the law of holiness, the conquest of the inner man, the establishment of the doctrine of Christ on the ruins of self-righteousness and of pride, and the erection within us of a kingdom of grace, and peace, and joy? In effecting this, we have not now indeed, like the Apostles, to resist the authority of learning, and rank, and power, of intellectual habits and social usages openly marshalled against Christianity. But we have still the ignorant and obdurate heart of man to conquer. We have still to remove settled prejudices against spiritual religion. We have still to cope with the love of the world, the dominion of passion, the force of evil customs, the maxims

of corrupt nature, the inertness and blindness and enmity of the human mind. We have still to subdue the pride and presumption of men, and to induce them to be saved by faith in the death and sacrifice of Christ. The drunkard, in short, is to be made sober, the unjust righteous, the careless thoughtful, the arrogant meek, the proud humble, the formal devout, the dead alive. In doing this, we have often to encounter misrepresentation and reproach, we have to *instruct those that oppose themselves*, we have to *endure all for the elect's sake*. And is there no triumph in accomplishing this? Is it nothing to be the means under God of overthrowing the kingdom of darkness, and of setting up the reign of religion and purity? Is it nothing to be the instrument of *binding the strong man armed; of taking away his armour in which he trusted, and in dividing the spoil*? Is it nothing to follow the Saviour in vanquishing *principalities and powers, and in making a show of them openly*?

We admit, indeed, that TO THE EYE OF SENSE THERE APPEARS NO SPLENDOUR IN ACHIEVING THESE VICTORIES. But what was there of external glory even in the case of the Apostle? Was he not in *labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft*? What is there of triumph here? Does he not say, *Of the Jews received I forty*

stripes save one, thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep. In journeyings often, in perils of water, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren? What is there of the earthly conqueror in all this? Follow him to Damascus, Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Ephesus, Jerusalem, Rome—in all these places the entrance and the departure of the Apostle, triumphant as they really were, were perhaps little regarded. The philosopher of Greece or Rome no doubt considered the life and actions of an unknown Jewish zealot as altogether contemptible. The cross of Christ which he preached, was to the Jew a stumbling-block and unto the Greek foolishness.

But still TO THE EYE OF PIETY AND FAITH there was, amidst all, A TRIUMPH. God gave testimony to the word of his grace. A great multitude of Jews and Greeks believed. The Lord added unto the Church daily such as should be saved. As many as were ordained unto eternal life, believed. The Apostle's entrance in was not in vain, but men turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. Many were washed and sanctified and justified in the

name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. These effects were infinitely momentous, and presented to the mind of the intelligent Christian, a spectacle of bright and surpassing splendour. To those who could estimate aright the value of the soul, the importance of redemption, the glory of the cross, and the nature of eternal salvation, no circumstance of outward display would appear requisite in order to constitute the noblest triumph. Nay the very external ignominy and sufferings and infirmities of the Apostle, contrasted with the effects of his preaching on the hearts and lives of men, would only the more illustrate the surprising victory of the grace of God.

In like manner, at the present period, the minister of Christ celebrates, in the ordinary course of his duties, an equally real, though, like St. Paul's, a spiritual conquest. It is true, he may be unknown to men in the quiet discharge of his high office, he may be exposed to the obloquy of an ill-judging world, and to the contempt perhaps of the more indolent part of the visible church; but, in the midst of all, he continues to preach a crucified Saviour, and his labour is not in vain. The Blessed Spirit makes the word of God effectual to the conversion of sinners; for the Gospel is the *power of God unto salvation*: and the holy conduct and Christian order of the converts attest the change.

And is not this a real triumph? Is not captivity here led captive? Is not the fortress of the human heart taken? Are not the *weapons* of such a *warfare*, *not carnal*, but *mighty through God, to the pulling down of strong holds*, casting down *imagination*s, and every high thing that *exalteth itself against the knowledge of God*, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ? Do not the humility and tears and sufferings and weakness and difficulties of the minister, who is the means of achieving all this, together with the very prejudices and opposition which seemed to impede his success, display more conspicuously the glory of the triumph?

And in cases of REMARKABLE REVIVALS OF RELIGION, when the *word of God runs* more rapidly and is glorified, when the minister comes among his people in the *fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ*; when there is a copious effusion of the grace of the Holy Ghost, and a concern for religion spreads far and wide; when many are awakened and converted, and the work of the Lord eminently prospers, may not the language of the text be applied in a still more full and appropriate sense? Is not this a magnificent *triumph*, not perhaps to the world and human reason, but before a far more glorious assemblage of spectators,—before the *general assembly and church*

of the first-born, which are written in heaven;—before God the judge of all, and the spirits of just men made perfect, and Jesus the mediator of the new covenant.

This triumph is described in the text, to be IN CHRIST; and that because it is gained entirely by HIS GRACE. It is not natural reason, or the power or skill of the minister, or his experience in the Gospel, or his energy and address, which can change and illuminate a single heart. It is only by the secret virtue of Christ, the great Captain of our salvation, that the victory is won.

It is also in Him, because it is gained by his DOCTRINE, and by that only. It is not by *enticing words of man's wisdom*, but by plainly exhibiting the simple truths of redemption, that men are converted unto God. Mere moral suasion, heathen ethics, recondite disquisitions, cold and general statements, refined beauties of language, affected eloquence, never yet subdued a fallen and stubborn sinner. It is the doctrine of the cross of Christ which God has ordained for this end. It is only by the Saviour being held up to the eyes of perishing sinners, that they can look and live.

It is likewise a triumph in Christ because it is effected by THE MEANS OF CHRIST'S APPOINTMENT; not by force or persecution, but by a holy example and mild and continual efforts,

by faithful appeals to the conscience, and affectionate warnings and invitations addressed to the heart. The minister that girds himself for the contest in the name of Christ, that relies on his grace, preaches his doctrine, and employs the means of his appointment, may anticipate a triumph. *The hand of the Lord shall be with him. Satan shall fall like lightning from heaven.* The hosts of sin shall be discomfited. The sinner shall be born anew. His heart shall admit the Saviour; and his humble faith, holy tempers, and conscientious conduct, shall be the trophies of the conquest.

HOW SUPERIOR IS THIS TRIUMPH TO EVERY OTHER! In human conflicts, although we may bless the hand of Providence for the benefits which a victory may ultimately effect, we cannot but contemplate the circumstances connected with the event itself, with regret and sorrow. In order to be really pleased with it, we must overlook, if possible, all the public and private misery which war scatters around, and fix the mind on its remote consequences—the peace and security and repose which it may tend to establish. But in the triumphs of the Gospel, not only is the end glorious, but the means likewise. They are calculated to bless man. Every struggle towards the conquest, is a step in the overthrow of sin and misery, and the establishment of holiness and peace. The tri-

umph is not in a mournful and perhaps ambiguous cause, but in the cause of God himself, and for the victories of his grace. It is not to enlarge the limits of a temporal empire, but to spread the spiritual kingdom of Jesus Christ. It is not a proud, gaudy, ostentatious display of standards and captives and trophies and spoils, but a secret and internal victory, by which sinners are saved, passions are overcome, sin and hell are vanquished, and God is glorified. It is not to gratify the pride of a haughty soldier, inflamed with the lust of conquest, and in a procession in which captive kings are insulted and dragged in chains; but for the honour of Christ our heavenly Lord, and in which the slaves of sin are rescued, the prison-doors are thrown open, and men, being made *heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ*, are exalted and honoured by the service of the Gospel, and are prepared for heavenly triumphs and endless exultation.

But this leads me to consider,

II. THE SPECIAL BLESSINGS WHICH THE CHRISTIAN MINISTER COMMUNICATES—and *maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.*

There is always a proportion in the Holy Scripture, between the description, and the importance of the thing described. No triumph,

no glorying is spoken of, except the occasion justly demands it. The language of transport in the text, accordingly indicates the grandeur of the main benefit conferred. In this triumph God *maketh manifest the savour of Christ's knowledge in every place*. This was before intimated, when it was said that the triumph was *in Christ*; but it now requires our more particular regard. The allusion is to the custom in the Roman procession of strewing the streets with flowers and causing the altars to smoke with incense, whilst immediately before the victorious general a long train of attendants marched carrying perfumes, which exhaled a sweet and powerful fragrance on every side. Thus, wherever the spiritual triumph of the Apostle advanced, the knowledge of Christ, like a reviving odour, was diffused around, and men were refreshed and quickened and invigorated.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST is the leading blessing which the Gospel confers. Other truths may indeed be necessary as introductory to it, or consequent upon it; but Christ, as the Saviour of sinners, is the first and last object of divine revelation, the basis and the substance of Christian doctrine.

All that we are taught of man's first apostacy, his accountableness, guilt, and condemnation, the obligation and holiness of the divine law, the infinite purity of God, the evil

of the heart, and the wickedness of the lives of men, is essential to the production of true humility and genuine repentance:—this is not in itself the *knowledge of Christ*; but it usually precedes it. In like manner, the instructions, warnings, and admonitions necessary for the true believer—all that relates to the immutable force of the precepts of the moral law, the necessity of holy obedience, and the connexion of the motives of the Gospel with a practical and willing subjection to its precepts; all that regards the dangers, trials, and temptations of the Christian life; the duties of diligence, vigilance, prayer, meekness, and charity,—is indispensable to a correct view of the doctrine of salvation. These topics also are not, strictly speaking, the *knowledge of Christ*, but they are essentially connected with it and follow upon it. Again, the work and person of the Holy Ghost, the necessity of regeneration, the nature of communion with God, the excellency of the Scriptures, the nearness of death, the value of the soul, the importance of employing our talents, the doctrine of providence, the solemnities of a future judgment, are all vital parts of the Gospel, and, like the others which I have mentioned, are necessary to a right reception and use of the proper knowledge of Christ.

The knowledge of Christ, strictly taken, more immediately regards the divine person and

grace of Jesus Christ, his glory as the eternal, incommunicable Word, his incarnation for our redemption, his obedience, sufferings, and death, the atonement and propitiation which he made to God by his vicarious sacrifice, his resurrection, ascension, and session at the right hand of the Father, his mediatorial kingdom and glory as the *heir of all things*, and the *head of the Church*; the new covenant in his blood; the free and full offers of its blessings to the greatest sinners; faith in his promises; pardon, justification, and acceptance through his merits and righteousness, reconciliation and adoption into the family of God thereby, union with Christ by his Spirit, love to his name, the imitation of his holy example, the supports of his grace, the expectation of his second coming, and his presenting the Christian at last spotless before the throne of God—these are some of the chief particulars of the *excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord*. These, when connected with the topics which precede them and those which follow upon them, form the truth as it is in Jesus. These are the characteristic features of Christianity. They are the peculiar blessings which the victory of the Apostle communicated. The divine Mediator is the principal figure in the vast and magnificent picture. All the other figures are subordinate, and must not assume the first place.

The person of Christ is to be the bold and commanding object, around which all the dependent ones must be ranked. We are *to preach, not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord.* We must be *determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified.* We are to preach the *unsearchable riches of Christ.* Nor can any circumstances of previous religious knowledge and information in a congregation, any profession of evangelical truth, any fashion, or bias of a part of the visible church, any purity of a national creed, any supposed and implied regard to fundamental truths, warrant the minister of religion to withhold or lessen the full display of the *knowledge of Christ.* If this doctrine be but faintly or partially enunciated, the triumph of the minister will carry no resemblance to that of the Apostle.

But who can describe fitly the SAVOUR of this knowledge?—*and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.* The mystery of redemption is not a cold abstract truth, like a subtile question in metaphysics, an obscure point in chronology, or a probable fact in history; it is not like the discovery of some new truth in mathematical science; it is not like an invention in the arts, or an application of skill in philosophy to the practical business of life. It is something infinitely greater and more interesting than all these. It involves

all the purposes and designs of God, it unfolds all the mysteries of the incarnation and death of Christ, it engages all the adorations of the heavenly hosts, it relates to the highest interests of man, rescues him from the most fearful state of guilt and misery, and proposes to him the most unutterable blessings. There is, therefore, a savour, a fragrance, an unction, an odour, so to speak, in the knowledge of Christ. *As ointment and perfume, it rejoices the heart. Because of the savour of his good ointments, the name of Christ is as ointment poured forth. All his garments smell of myrrh and aloes and cassia. His words are sweet to the taste, yea sweeter than honey to the mouth.* These expressions imply something of delight and relish and refreshment in the doctrine of the Saviour, which it is difficult adequately to describe.

As a proof of this, ask only the guilty and self-condemned penitent who has suffered during a long period the torments of an accusing conscience, who has felt even upon earth the terrors of the wrath of God, and has repeatedly sought for relief, but in vain; and who has endeavoured fruitlessly to obtain peace, amongst other ways, by an adherence to the covenant of works. Inquire what he felt when the knowledge of justification by the merits of the Saviour alone was first communicated to his agitated mind. He will tell you there was a sa-

your in the knowledge of Christ, which no words can express.

Inquire again of the afflicted and tempted, the harassed and perplexed Christian, whose heart, depressed with trouble, has long implored deliverance and succour, and has not found it; and whom infirmity and unbelief and conscious unworthiness have united to deject and terrify. Bid him tell you what he thought of the knowledge of his compassionate Saviour and High Priest, when it was again brought with efficacy and power to his mind. He will rejoice to acknowledge, because he will have deeply felt, its unspeakable blessedness.

Or ask the expiring Christian, as he lies on the bed of death; when *his heart and his flesh fail him*; when he approaches the ghastly tomb; when the world recedes from his view; and when he is entering on an untried and eternal scene. Mark with what transport he hears and speaks of an almighty Saviour, and how a new animation kindles in his sinking eye as he is told of his glory and his love.

The name of Christ is to such persons as a reviving fragrance to the faint, as pardon to a condemned criminal, as healing to the sick, as rest to the weary, food to the hungry, water to the thirsty, yea as life to the dead. The image of the text—strong as it is, when we recollect the customs of eastern nations, and the constant

introduction of odoriferous waters and other perfumes as constituting almost one of the necessities of life—is not unsuitable to represent the ineffable consolation of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.

I am aware that this language may be regarded as tinctured with enthusiasm. Many will be disposed to say that they can perfectly understand what is intended by the doctrine of Christ's redemption, but that this *savour of his knowledge* appears to them to border on what is vague and unintelligible. But let such persons remember that the language of the Holy Ghost in the text, obviously leads to our receiving it in some way at least consonant to the explanation which has been given. Surely the knowledge of Christ, and the savour of that knowledge, ought not to be identified as including but one and the same notion. And, indeed, what is the chief difference between speculation and faith, but the perception of this very savour? What is one great distinction between the form and the power of godliness, the external profession and the internal experience, but this new consciousness of holy delight in the contemplation of Jesus Christ? We admit that the corrupt moral taste of men who have never so repented of sin as to abhor it, and therefore have never comprehended this doctrine aright, can find no sweetness or refreshment in it; but the holy

and enlightened mind is not to be measured by the low, defective standard which is adapted to the sensual and immoral. Thus, in natural things, disease, it is true, may vitiate the organs, and the most exquisite perfumes may become in such cases offensive. Yet it is no less true, that, when the sensitive powers have been obstructed or perverted, a due and natural perception of the sensible qualities of objects is to be reckoned among the most striking evidences of returning health.

This, then, is the special blessing communicated in the triumph of Christ. The knowledge of him, like the sweetest unction, is manifested wherever it makes its progress. And as the woman in the Gospel came to our blessed Lord *having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious, and brake the box and poured it on his head, so that the house was filled with the odour of the ointment*: so the holy Apostle in every place to which he came, proclaimed the saving truths of Christ, and the whole surrounding atmosphere was filled, as it were, with the fragrance of the heavenly doctrine.

But we proceed to consider,

III. THE GRATITUDE WHICH THE APOSTLE OFFERS TO GOD FOR THIS TRIUMPH.

The language of the text is that of impas-

sioned transport — *Now, thanks be unto God which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place!*

God, in the dispensation of his grace, uses such instruments as may best illustrate his own glory. Saint Paul is remarkable for entering into this design. He uniformly ascribes all the praise of his success to Him who alone caused him to obtain it. He claims no honour to himself. *By the grace of God*, he says, *I am what I am, and his grace which was bestowed on me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*

And, indeed, if the Roman conqueror in his triumph is said to have deposited his golden crown in the lap of Jupiter when he arrived at the Capitol, and to have dedicated to him a part of the spoils which he had won; much more should the Apostle of Christ cast his crown at the feet of his gracious Saviour, and devote all his acquisitions to his honour. Yes, the conscience of the unenlightened heathen in his worship of an idol, shall not outstrip the humility and piety of the Christian minister in his adoration of the true and only God. Instead of accepting the songs of praise which accompany the triumph, as the Roman victor did those which celebrated his prowess and his suc-

cess, the lowly servant of God shall sing the praises of Immanuel, and ascribe to him, and to him alone, all the glory.

For it is not so much the feeble instrument that is caused to triumph, as the Saviour himself who *goes forth conquering and to conquer*. He is the real victor. *He girds his sword upon his thigh as most mighty, with his glory and his majesty; in his majesty he rides prosperously, and his right hand teaches him terrible things.* It is he who came to save. It is he who calls and qualifies the minister. It is he who appoints him to his station. It is he who opens the heart and inclines the will of men. It is he who enters the soul *in the day of his power*. It is he who gains the victory over sin, the world, and the flesh. He employs, indeed, the instrumentality of men; but the victory is all his own.

This is a fundamental point. The moment the minister of Christ, unfaithful to his trust, begins to glory in himself, and to ascribe his success to his own arm and the might of his own power, he may expect to be deserted by his Lord. To him may be applied the prophetic denunciation, *Woe to the idol shepherd; the sword shall be upon his arm and upon his right eye; his arm shall be clean dried up; and his right eye shall be utterly darkened.* But the humble minister, after the example of the

Apostle, will give the entire honour to his divine Master. He will bless God for the triumph. He will consider it an extraordinary favour that to him, *who is less than the least of all saints*, should *the grace be given, to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ*. He will feel such a love to his Saviour, such a zeal for his glory, such a compassion for immortal souls, such an apprehension of his own responsibility, such a conviction of the utter inability of man, and such an ardour for the success of his ministry, that any triumph granted to him in diffusing the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ, will awaken all his powers of love, admiration, and praise.

In comparison with such a triumph, he will think nothing of his labours and anxieties and afflictions; and without this victory, no attention, or regard, or affection, or zeal, of his people will satisfy his mind. To be made the instrument of dispensing salvation, is the holy ambition of his life. This is the object for which he pants. This the end of all his toils. To promote this he studies and prays and meditates. When this is attained, he forgets, like the generous conqueror, all his previous difficulties, and is filled with overflowing gratitude to his adorable Saviour. *None of these things*, will he say, *move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course*

with joy, and the ministry I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God.

If these things then be so; if the success of the Gospel be indeed a triumph in Christ; if the chief blessing communicated be his knowledge diffused as a fragrant odour; and if ardent offerings of praise ascend to God when this is accomplished,

I. Let us inquire, in the first place, WHETHER WE HAVE INDEED FOR OURSELVES OBEYED THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.

Have we considered the Gospel in the manner in which the text represents it? Have we understood the triumph connected with it? Have we received the knowledge of Christ which it exhibits? Have we perceived the fragrance of this doctrine? Or have we considered the Gospel chiefly as a notion, a creed, a profession, a report of certain great events, a rule of moral duties, and a proposal of various conditions of future salvation, little affecting the heart and less controlling the tempers and life? Is this our estimate of the cross of Christ? What! Have we no conception of its transforming and sanctifying efficacy? No notion of its grace? No impression of its surpassing glory? Has it never appeared to us in its power and richness and

amplitude, as the most conspicuous revelation of the divine love; the amazing display of the interposition of an incarnate God; the stupendous remedy provided for a ruined world; the manifestation *of the arm of the Lord, and the rod of his power?* Has it never yet TRIUMPHED OVER US; gained our souls, enlightened our ignorance, subdued our pride, rescued us from the world, bound us as willing captives to the Saviour, *delivered us from the power of Satan, and translated us into the kingdom of God's dear Son?* Has there been no conversion, no renovation, no resurrection of the soul, no birth from above, no change, no erection of a holy and spiritual kingdom within us on the ruins of that of sin and Satan?

Alas! in many who have heard the Gospel and approved it generally for years, these effects were never produced. They are still *dead in trespasses and sins*; they hear superficially; they rest in external privileges. They have no spiritual perception; they live a worldly life under a Christian name; they have never been won over to Christ; they are yet in the enemy's service; in a word, they neglect the practical business of salvation. As to the *savour of the knowledge of Christ*, they are strangers to the very language. Religion has never presented itself to them as a thing delightful and refresh-

ing. They view it as a duty, an obligation, a law, a task, a burden, a weariness ; and the less they can have of it, the better. The shorter the prayers, the sermon, the sabbath, the serious and pious conversation, the more are they pleased. They can find a delight in company, amusements, literary curiosities, philosophy, eloquence, politics, art, science, merchandise, the gratifications of appetite and passion ; but as to the unction and fragrance of the knowledge of the Redeemer, they are utterly ignorant of it. They treat it even with contempt. The Gospel must be handled with exquisite judgment and critical circumspection to gain their approbation at all. But the plain matters plainly stated, of man's ruined condition as a transgressor, of the desert of sin, of the necessity of repentance unto life, of faith in an atoning Saviour, salvation by grace, the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, mortification of every lust, separation from the world, and holy and devoted obedience of the heart and life to God—these they love not : as to the perception of any savour, any gust, any exquisite pleasure in them, they never once pretended to it. Their case, then, speaks for itself. All is with such persons mere form and speculation in religion. *They are alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance which is in them, because of the hard-*

ness of their hearts. They have yet every thing to learn with respect to serious piety.

Awake, then, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee life. Obey at length the voice of conscience, and yield to the conquering Redeemer; cast away the arms of rebellion, and bow to his righteous sceptre. Let Christ triumph in your soul, and *open wide the gates, that the King of glory may enter in. Behold, he stands at the door and knocks. Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.* Perhaps your heart softens as I speak. A secret wish rises in your soul, that you may be the Lord's. With an anxious countenance, you inquire if there be any way for your escape. You tremble for your sins, and feel your need of pardon. You perceive your bondage, and earnestly desire a deliverer.—You would gladly forsake and renounce the tyranny of the world. O auspicious moment! This, methinks, is the beginning of repentance; the crisis and very turning point of salvation. Stop not, then, here; but implore earnestly the gift of God's Holy Spirit. You shall not do this in vain. Whatever particular sin opposes the full victory of grace, and the salutary influences of the Spirit in your soul, renounce it, and cut it off, though it be dear as a right hand or a right eye. Nothing, my bre-

thren, can be done without energy and effort. Burst then from the chain, and cast yourselves at the Redeemer's feet. Thus shall you hear his voice of mercy; thus shall you receive pardon and strength; thus shall you be saved and blessed in him.

Your ministers also, instead of any longer mourning over your obstinacy and lamenting your opposition to the Gospel, shall thank God for your willing obedience to the law of grace. Instead of fearing lest the name of Jesus should, through your corrupt and perverted hearts, become, to use the Apostle's words, *a savour of death unto death*, they shall rejoice that it has become *a savour of life unto life*. Instead of being afflicted and grieved at your hardness and impenitence, they shall bless God for your conversion and salvation; and both to saints and angels the triumph over you shall be the occasion of everlasting adoration and praise.

II. But further, if, as I trust is the case with many of us, we have obeyed the Gospel, let us inquire WHETHER WE ARE HABITUALLY ACTING AGREEABLY TO IT. Are the effects of the victory evident? Are we growing in that subjection to our heavenly Lord, which we professed when we first knew the Gospel? Do the life and unction and sweetness and power of religion continue? I do not ask if you are perfect, but if

you are consistent; if you live in habitual repentance for sin, in habitual faith towards a crucified Redeemer, in habitual teachableness, humility, simplicity, purity, meekness and love? I would inquire if you honour the doctrine of the Gospel by holy tempers and a heavenly deportment? I would ask if the gracious effects of the promises, and the joy of reconciliation, and the peace of justification through faith, and the communion of prayer, and the fellowship of the Spirit, and the tenderness of an enlightened conscience, and the loveliness of an universal obedience continue? These are the sentiments and conduct which confirm and illustrate the triumph of Christ. These are the trophies of the conquest. Many seem to begin well; but it is only by holy perseverance, and a suitable advancement in sanctification, that they can evince the truth and reality of their Christian character.

When men *draw back*, or *walk disorderly*, or *are carried about by divers and strange doctrines*, the minister's triumph is turned into mourning. He *stands in doubt* of the individuals concerned; and, if he does his duty, he again and again *entreats* every one of them, *as a father doth his children, to walk worthy of God, who hath called them to his kingdom and glory.*

On the contrary, when professed believers in Christian truth go on regularly, adorn the Gospel, grow in grace, maintain the unity of the spirit, “obey them that have the rule over them,” submit to discipline, as well as honour and love their Lord; retain the savour of his knowledge, and manifest this savour in their families and connexions; when the *multitude of them that believe are of one mind, and walking in the fear of God and the comfort of the Holy Ghost, are multiplied*,—then the minister triumphs,—his people are *his joy and crown*, and he renders *thanks to God without ceasing at every remembrance of them all*.

And if even on earth the Christian minister thus shares this transport, what will be the triumph, when he joins the *church and assembly of the first-born which are written in heaven!* What the exultation, when the *mystery of Christ shall be finished, and God shall send out his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other;* when the Saviour shall *deliver up the kingdom to God even the Father, that God may be all in all!* What will then be the hallelujahs, what the acclamations of joy, what the harmony of praise! The feast which usually succeeded the earthly conquests to which we have so often alluded, is not worthy to be compared with that hea-

venly banquet which will follow the final success of the Christian's warfare;—when God shall wipe away tears from all faces, and the spiritual festival of divine grace and love shall endure, as the consequence of the Redeemer's stupendous triumph, through a blissful eternity!

THE END.

venly banquet which will follow the final success of the Christian's warfare;—when God shall wipe away tears from all faces, and the spiritual festival of divine grace and love shall endure, as the consequence of the Redeemer's stupendous triumph, through a blissful eternity!

ERRATUM.

Page 379, *for* Philippians, ii. 2, *read* ii. 5.

*The following Works, by the same Author, may
be had of the Publisher, GEORGE WILSON,
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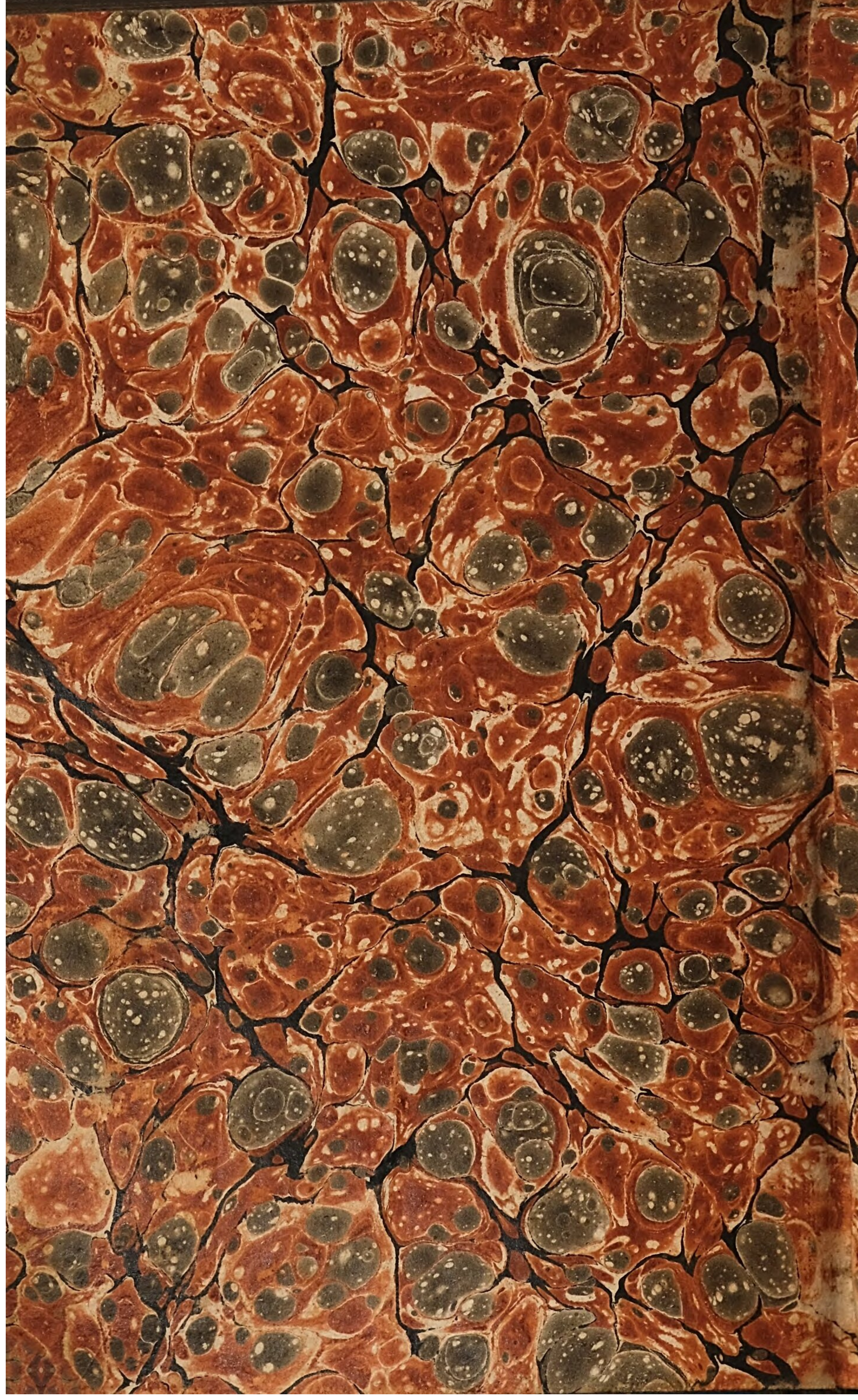
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